



Veiled and Unveiled Others: Revisiting Karl Barth's Gender Trouble

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Abstract

Karl Barth is frequently named as the poster-child for modern patriarchal and heteronormative theologies. In *Church Dogmatics* he secures a binary, hierarchically-ordered, marital relationship between a man and woman as the norm for conceptualizing not only sexual difference but all inter-subjective relationships among human beings. Human beings find in the opposite sex their paradigmatic human “other,” and marriage to someone of the opposite sex provides the occasion in which one is able to most fully realize the sort of being-in-encounter that conforms to the self-giving, self-revealing, aid-lending relationship that Christ has established with the Christian community. The asymmetry of the relationship between Christ and his community translates into the super-/subordering of the relationship between the sexes, wherein women are lead, directed, and inspired by men. Barth applies this “ordering” beyond marriage to all interactions between the sexes. Many critics have argued that Barth’s ordering of the sexes exposes a systemic structure of domination and submission instantiated in the many relationships that comprise his theology. Others have sought a corrective to his ordering in his doctrine of the Trinity, but a corrective that demands a reconstruction of his innovative reformulation of the doctrine of election along with his christocentric theological anthropology. Until recently little critical attention has been given to his heteronormative framework.

This dissertation advances a fresh approach by shifting focus from the question of the function of “order” in Barth’s theology to Barth’s christocentric understanding of human agency itself. Through contextualized close readings in Barth’s ethics, doctrine of creation, and

theological anthropology, I argue that his methodological, dogmatic, and ethical commitments lead to an account of the human agent that is carefully detached from naturalizing and scientific discourses and crafted after the aid-lending, self-revelatory activity of the incarnate Christ. Constituted as a response to the divine address, human beings are called into existence as morally responsible actors and set on the path toward lending aid to and receiving aid from their human neighbors.

I mobilize this account of agency to resist, unsettle, and reconfigure Barth's androcentric and heteronormative construal of sexual difference for the purpose of securing Barth's *Church Dogmatics* as a resource for theologies that resist the reduction of all inter-human differences to one overarching hierarchical model of difference. First, I argue that when Barth attempts to order the relationship between the sexes, he turns his christocentric model of agency, along with its ethical impulse, into a male prerogative, and he leaves a truncated and unlivable version for women to appropriate. By foregrounding the self-revealing and critically corrective features of the human agent's encounter with the other, I argue that Barth's model of agency, if fully appropriated by women, secures a site for the sort of feminist critique that Barth attempts to quash: a critique that challenges the prerogatives and positions of power that Barth presumes are proper to men alone. Second, I show that Barth's effort to integrate the Gospels' figure of the unmarried Christ into his heteronormative framework exposes the tenuous grounds on which he attempts to secure the centrality of sexual difference within his broader christocentric project. As a corrective, I turn to Barth's discussions of Christ's relationship to ethnically differentiated others. Here I locate a far more open, fluid, and flexible way of thinking about the self's relationship to other human beings, which is inclusive of a wide variety of relationships and communal organizations. Finally, while Barth configures sexual difference as an oppositional

division that must be carefully policed and maintained, Barth calls for a critical and performative appropriation of the norms, customs, and social mores through which the sexes are differentiated. This relation opens up space within Barth's heteronormative framework for performances that unsettle, subvert, and transgress the reputedly unambiguous dividing line between the sexes that these norms instantiate.

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Dedicated to

Mike

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, Barth's theology has invited a variety of nonfoundational and postmodern theological readings and appropriations. It has been used as a resource for theological projects that refuse central foundational principles, that are open to multiple and contextual ways of knowing, that resist bringing multiple sites of particularity under a single, totalizing, universal framework.¹ Yet careful assessment has not been given to the limitations that Barth's sexist and heteronormative conception of sexual difference imposes upon readings of Barth's theology that resist the reduction of all inter-human differences to one overarching hierarchical model of difference. For at the heart of his theological anthropology and its accompanying special ethics (*Church Dogmatics* III/2, §45, "Man in his Determination as the covenant-Partner of God," and III/4, §54, "Freedom in Fellowship")² Barth secures a binary, hierarchically ordered, marital relationship between a man and woman as the norm for conceptualizing not only sexual difference but all inter-subjective relationships among human beings. Human beings find in the opposite sex their paradigmatic human "other," and marriage to someone of the opposite sex provides the occasion in which one is able to most fully realize the sort of being-in-encounter that conforms to the self-giving, self-revealing, covenantal relationship that Christ has established with the Christian community. The asymmetry of the

¹ The result has been comparative analyses with figures like Derrida, Levinas and Wittgenstein. The most noteworthy include: Steven G. Smith, *The Argument to the Other: Reason Beyond Reason in the Thought of Karl Barth and Emmanuel Levinas* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983); Stephen H. Webb, *Re-Figuring Theology: The Rhetoric of Karl Barth* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); Walter Lowe, *Theology and Difference: The Wound of Reason* (Bloomington: University Press, 1993); Graham Ward, *Barth, Derrida and the Language of Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Isolde Andrews, *Deconstructing Barth: A Study of the Complementary Methods in Karl Barth and Jacques Derrida* (New York: Lang, 1996); William Stacy Johnson, *The Mystery of God: Karl Barth and the Postmodern Foundations of Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

² A note in regard to citations of primary texts: for brevity within the notes, I occasionally use the annotation *CD* when referring to the English translation, *Church Dogmatics*, and *KD* when referring to the German text, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*.

relationship between Christ and his community likewise finds an analogy in an ordering between the sexes wherein men lead, direct, and inspire women, and this super-/subordering applies not only in marriage but across all interactions between the sexes and thus has significant political and domestic implications. In Barth's special ethics it manifests in his instruction that women in abusive relationships should inspire men to better behavior through quiet self-restraint, and also in his depiction of the feminist movement as an envious grasping after the God-given agential prerogative of men (§54.1). It is not surprising, then, that Barth has for some time been viewed as the poster-child for modern patriarchal theologies and, more recently, for heterosexist and complementation theologies.

These features of Barth's theological anthropology have evoked a great deal of criticism and been subjected to a number of reconstructive interventions. Most critics appreciate the central place that Barth's theological anthropology gives to the relationships between the sexes and direct their critical and reconstructive energies to its super-/subordering. They examine the ways in which Barth grounds the ordering between the sexes in a recurring pattern of asymmetrical ordered relationships and his selection and interpretation of biblical texts to support this ordering. This dominant approach takes its cue from Barth's references to an "analogy of relations," in which he speaks of a correspondence in a series of relationships: Father and Son *ad intra*, Father and Son *ad extra*, Christ's divinity and Christ's humanity, God and humanity, Yahweh and Israel, Christ and Church, heaven and earth, soul and body, and so forth. The driving question is whether the super/subordering of the male female relationship is the unavoidable symptom of a pervasive pattern of asymmetrical ordering that favors one party, or whether some of these relationships offer resources for a imagining an egalitarian mutual interaction between the sexes.

This path of critique has followed two trajectories. One trajectory finds in one or more of the binary, asymmetrical dyads of Barth's "analogy of relations," a reciprocity and mutuality, a shared give-and-take, between partners that can correct Barth's rigid hierarchical sexual binary. The immanent trinitarian relationship (the eternal relational movement and fellowship between the persons of the Trinity) is seen by many as the most fruitful site for serving this reconstructive end. Barth develops his doctrine of the Trinity in the first volume of *Church Dogmatics*. Although Barth says very little in the third volume's theological anthropology about the correspondence between this inter-trinitarian relationship and inter-human relationships, the very fact that he draws an analogy between them, and that he even links the imago Dei of Genesis 1 to the relationship between the sexes, is considered warrant enough for the trinitarian relationship to serve as *the* corrective for reconfiguring Barth's ordering of the sexes. These critics privilege the relationship between Father and Son for a number of reasons: the inter-trinitarian relationship is seen to occupy the highest rung on the ontological ladder of Barth's "analogy of relations"; the relational partners inhabit the same ontological plane; Barth maintains an orthodox rejection of any subordination in being or activity in the immanent economy of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; Barth speaks of a perichoretic exchange among the triune persons, entailing a mutual interpenetration and exchange of functions, wherein each participates fully in the electing, creating, saving activity of the others. Critics find that this equality and fluidity of being and function can be used to reconfigure Barth's rigid distinction and hierarchy in roles, characteristics, and functions distinguishing the sexes. Leading and following, however these may play out in everyday life, cannot be assigned strictly to any one sex, if the perichoretic participation of each triune person in the activity of the other is the primary analogue. If Barth can recognize the full humanity of both men and women, and if he can speak of a mutuality and

reciprocity between the sexes (and he does both),³ then the immanent trinitarian relation provides a corrective that secures an egalitarian relationship between the sexes.⁴

In this interpretive trajectory, critics often link the immanent trinitarian relationship, laid out in the first volume of *Church Dogmatics*, with Barth's detailed discussion of inter-human fellowship between an "I" and "Thou" found in his third volume's theological anthropology (§45.2). There Barth employs the phenomenology of dialogical personalism to describe human

³ Barth does both because he wants to depict the relationship as an egalitarian scene of reciprocal recognition between I and Thou: in §45.2 he describes at length a fluid, reciprocity and mutuality between I and Thou which entails a mutual seeing, speaking, hearing and aid-lending that does not instantiate any ordering. Then in §45.3 he identifies the relationship between the sexes as the site in which this encounter is most fully realized, and at the same time he speaks of an ordering between agents, of first and second actors, leaders and followers that finds no place in the previous account. He repeatedly insists that the relationship between the sexes entails both the mutuality and equality of §45.2 and the ordering of §45.3.

⁴ Most book-length projects and dissertations on the topic of sexual difference in Barth's theology come to the conclusion that the immanent Trinitarian relation offers a corrective to an otherwise pervasive problematic ordering. Cynthia M. Campbell ("Imago Trinitatis: An Appraisal of Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Imago Dei in Light of His Doctrine of the Trinity" [PhD diss., Southern Methodist University, 1981]) argues that the perichoretic reciprocity between Father and Son in *CD* I will correct the problematic sequence of first and second actors, because it entails a sharing of initiative and response and a sharing of functions. She finds this reciprocity is later corrupted by Barth's revamping of the doctrine of election in *CD* II, where he incorporates the ordering between God and creature into the immanent-trinitarian life. She argues that the immanent trinitarian relation of *CD* I should serve as the foundational analogy for Barth's theological anthropology because later on in III/1 he locates the image of God in the relationship between the sexes (see esp. 95-138 for her trinitarian corrective). Yet she suspects Barth's problematic ordering pervades his entire *Dogmatics* because it is embedded in the very epistemology of the doctrine of revelation that drives his entire theological project, which centers on a commanding divine actor and an obedient human responder. In her study of Barth's analog of relations, Elizabeth Frykberg (*Karl Barth's Theological Anthropology: An Analogical Critique Regarding Gender Relations* [Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1993]) finds that the problematic ordering of the sexes results from a christocentrism in which Christ serves as the primary analogy for human relationships. Christ (qua Son) participates in two different relational orderings: the unilateral perichoretic relationship between Father and Son and the hierarchal relationship between God and humankind. Barth wants both patterns of order to play out in the relationship between the sexes, and so he subordinates women to men while at the same time insisting that this entails no diminishment of the dignity of women in an otherwise reciprocal relationship of interpersonal exchange. She proposes a corrective that retains both types of orderings within inter-human relationships, but assigns the hierarchical order to the relationship between parent and child and the unilateral reciprocal order to the relationship between men and women (51-2). A number of shorter article-length assessments agree that the trinitarian perichoretic relationships of *CD* I can correct Barth's rigid, fixed, undialectical ordering of and distinction between the sexes. The interpenetration and exchange of functions among the three divine persons, without loss of their individual distinctiveness, allows for a dialectical reconfiguration wherein male and female identity interpenetrate, and attributes and functions are shared, as is authority and leadership (Alexander J. McKelway, "Perichoretic Possibilities in Barth's Doctrine of Male and Female," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 7, no.3 [January 1986]: 231-43; Paul S. Fiddes, "The Status of Woman in the Thought of Karl Barth," in *After Eve: Women, Theology and the Christian Tradition*, ed. Janet Martin Soskice [London: Marshall Pickering, 1990], 138-153, 150-153, esp. 148-9; Timothy J. Gorringer, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999], 197-207; Jason Springs, "Following at a Distance (Again): Gender, Equality, and Freedom in Karl Barth's Theological Anthropology," *Modern Theology* 28, no.3 [July 2012]: 447-77).

fellowship as an interaction of mutual seeing, hearing, speaking and aid-lending, and he makes no mention of hierarchical ordering when he describes the reciprocity of the shared give-and-take between I and Thou. Some find this mutuality and fluidity to be analogous to the perichoretic relation between Father and Son. Only in the following section (§45.3) does Barth name the relationship between the sexes as the site in which such an exchange is most fully realized, in all its reciprocity and mutuality, but critics find that he goes on to compromise this insight when he imposes upon this mutual relationship an order in which men lead, initiate and inspire. Many suspect that this compromise results because Barth wants the relationship between the sexes to correspond not only to the mutuality and reciprocity of the immanent trinitarian fellowship but also to relationships that embed the ontological distinction between God and humankind, with its unavoidable hierarchical order. Barth wants to secure in human fellowships not only an analogy of the relation between Father and Son, but also (and with a greater emphasis in his account) an analogy between Yahweh's relationship to Israel and, above all, Christ's relationship to the Church. Their proposed corrective requires an emphasis on the role of the immanent Trinity in shaping and correcting Barth's theological anthropology, and a corresponding de-emphasis of the christological shape that his anthropology takes.⁵

⁵ Not all who seek internal resources to reconfigure the relationship between the sexes agree that the Trinity provides the corrective, for some argue that the ordering of the analogy of relations corrupts even his doctrine of the Trinity in *CD* I. Lisa P. Stephenson, ("Directed, ordered and related: The male and female interpersonal relation in Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*," *SJT* 61, no.4 (2008): 435-449), argues that Barth's doctrine of the Trinity in *CD* I preserves the analogical grounding for Barth's later ordering of the sexes. Barth's adherence to an orthodox account of an eternally begetting Father and an eternally begotten Son embeds the sort of ordering of origin and sequence that Barth later in *CD* III/1 puts to work in subordinating women to men by way of the Genesis creation scene of Eve's origin. Stephenson argues furthermore, that perichoresis is not the solution, because for Barth perichoresis does not entail the loss of functional distinctions, for while there is a sharing of divine attributes, there remains a formal difference with respect to relations of origin. Genetic relations of origin play out in both the immanent Trinity and in the relation between men and women, giving rise to Barth's infamous reduction of the relation between men and women to the sequence between A and B. By *CD* II, Barth's reformulation of the doctrine of election serves to further support the trinitarian basis for his ordering of the sexes, because he binds the elected human being so intimately with the eternally begotten Word that he all but collapses economic Trinity into immanent Trinity, embedding the ontological distinction between Creator and creature (and its order of origins) in the eternal electing will and communion of Father and Son. Thus Stephenson locates the problem in the Trinity

If it intends to correct Barth on his own terms and within his own methodological framework this is a tricky intervention, for Barth's christocentric methodological commitments keep the distinction between God and humankind at the center of his theological anthropology. Barth constructs his theological anthropology from a high christology that embeds the ontological distinction between God and humankind in the being and existence of Christ. Christ's human existence is directed and governed by the activity and identity of the triune Son, and so the ordering that critics problematize is embedded in the christology that shapes his anthropology. Barth depicts human agency as a response to, and imitation of, Christ's existence. He makes very limited references to the correspondence between inter-human relations and immanent trinitarian relations as he develops his anthropology. Furthermore, this approach fails to adequately recognize that the analogical connection Barth draws between the *imago Dei* and the Trinity does not actually forge a direct connection between inter-human relations and inter-divine relations (uncomplicated by the incarnation), for Barth identifies the *imago Dei* specifically with the humanity of Christ, which is bound from eternity with the electing Son.

itself: Barth preserves a "static relational order" of the sexes that arises because he superimposes the trinitarian order of Father-Son onto the creation order of Adam and Eve in III/1. But she sees hope in the reciprocal exchange between I and Thou in his §45.2 account of inter-human fellowship. Elouise Renich Fraser ("Karl Barth's Doctrine of Humanity: A Reconstructive Exercise in Feminist Narrative Theology," PhD diss., Vanderbilt University, 1986; Fraser, "Jesus' Humanity and Ours in the Theology of Karl Barth," in *Perspectives on Christology: essays in honor of Paul K. Jewett*, ed. Marguerite Shuster, et al. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991], 179-96) goes a step further than Stephenson, arguing that not only the ordering of immanent Trinity but even the ordering of I to Thou in §45.2 is distorted by a super-/subordering that corrupts Barth's entire doctrine of creation and its hierarchically arranged dyadic relationships. Barth maintains an irreversible priority of Father over Son, God over creature, and man over woman, which is reflected in the priority of "I" over "Thou" in §45.2. She finds that Barth depicts the "I" as first to act upon Thou, rather than one who is acted upon or imposed upon by an acting "Thou," and so his account encodes an active/passive binary in the encounter of I with Thou. She finds an internal corrective in an alternate pattern of order at play in Barth's ethical configuration of the neighbor in in *CD* I/2, §18 and also in his depiction of Christ's relationship to his community (§45.1). In these instances she finds Barth speaks of an irreversible order that prioritizes the 'other.' Here the human agent is imposed upon by the needs and activity of the other and obligated to respond accordingly. This priority of the 'other' can correct Barth's problematic ordering for it requires each of the sexes to give precedence to the other, to attend to the needs of the other. In attending to the imposition of the other upon the self, Fraser's project comes close to my own, but, as I shall argue in Chapter 4, her preoccupation with a recurring pattern of order prevents her from recognizing that the imposition of the other upon the self is at play even in §45.2 as well. I shall argue that Barth's emphasis upon the initiating spontaneous activity of the "I" in §45.2 is due to his efforts to secure the ethical basis for the self's responsibility for the other, which he depicts as a Christ-like imitation of a self-risking aid-lending activity.

Barth's connection of the *imago Dei* with the relationship between the sexes is thus a christological connection. Because Barth builds his theological anthropology upon a high christology, the incarnation keeps the relationship between Creator and human creature at the center of his theological anthropology, and with it the subordination of human agency to divine agency. Consequently a trinitarian corrective would require a complete revamping of Barth's theological anthropology and the doctrine of election upon which it is built, if it is to rebuild his theological anthropology from his doctrine of the Trinity. Not all critics seem to realize the full extent to which his theological anthropology would need to be reworked if the immanent trinitarian relations were to provide the central frame of reference for his theological anthropology.

With this qualification we come to the second trajectory, which argues that the ordering of the relationship between men and women exposes a pervasive systemic pattern of domination and submission that arises from Barth's commitment to an absolute qualitative distinction between Creator and creature, one in which the divine actor overwhelms and eviscerates the human actor. These critics find this super/subordering embedded at the center of Barth's christocentric theological anthropology in the very ontological constitution of the incarnate Christ, and some recognize that Barth's innovative revamping of the doctrine of election in the second volume of *Church Dogmatics* limits the usability of his first volume's doctrine of the Trinity as a corrective to his third volume's theological anthropology. His doctrine of election all but conflates the immanent Trinity (who God is in Godself) with the economic Trinity (who God is in God's relationship to creation) by projecting the eternal decision of God to elect and sustain a relationship with humankind back into the eternal immanent relationship between Father and Son: from eternity the electing Father and the elected Son have resolved to establish the unity of

the Son with an individual human being—Jesus Christ. These critics suspect that because this eternal intimate union of the Son with Jesus Christ pushes the distinction between the Creator and creature back into the immanent trinitarian relations, it secures the immanent trinitarian ground for an ordering of will and activity in which one leads and the other follows, one commands and the other obeys. This order is then replicated in the relationship of Christ to community and men to women. Still others note that even the first volume's doctrine of the Trinity lends support to Barth's problematic ordering of the sexes, for the eternal generation of Son from Father has an order of origin that is analogous to the order of origin that Barth appeals to in the creation scene of Eve in Genesis 2. In his exegesis of this text (III/1, §41.3) he argues that the sequential origin of Eve from Adam reflects the divinely ordained sequential ordering of their activity, wherein males initiate and females respond. For this interpretive trajectory, there is no corrective--Barth's theology is hopeless compromised from the very beginning.⁶

⁶ In this trajectory of critique, some attribute Barth's recurring pattern of ordering to a problematic use of analogy that compares the incomparable. Barth seeks analogies where there can be no analogies, for the relationship between the trinitarian persons and the relationship between God and creatures (whether Yahweh's relation to Israel or Christ's to the Church) defy any analogy whatsoever between human beings (JoAnn Ford Watson, *A Study of Karl Barth's Doctrine of Man and Woman* [New York: Vantage Press, 1995]; Yolanda Dreyer, "Karl Barth's Male-Female Order as Asymmetrical Theoethics," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 63, no. 4 [November 2007]: 1493-521; Emma J. Justes, "Theological Reflections on the Role of Women in Church and Society" *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 32, no.1 [March 1978]: 42-54). Others find that his pervasive hierarchical ordering derives from his emphasizes on divine enabling activity and utter creaturely incapacity, which enshrines an active/passive dichotomy at the heart of his theological project, which is replicated in every part of his analogy of relations. Along these lines, Rosemary Radford Ruether (*Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1983]: 94-99) names Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Barth as exemplars of a patriarchal anthropology. Barth belongs to a Calvinist tradition that situates female subordination within a divine order reflecting the covenant of creation and reestablished in covenant of grace in which Christ rules his people. It is an order in which there are leaders and followers. Joan Arnold Romero ("Karl Barth's Theology of the Word of God: Or, how to Keep Women Silent and in their Place," in *Women and Religion*, ed. by Judith Plaskow Goldenberg [Missoula, MT: University of Montana, 1973], 35-48) finds that Barth's theology is one of domination and oppression because it preserves at its heart a master-servant relation in which God commands and humans obey. Thus the subservience of a passive incapacitated human to the divine actor finds its human analogy in the domination of women by men. Such a theology leads to destructive relations of domination within church and society. Jacquelyn Grant (*White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989], 68-4) finds in Barth's theology a representative of the theological and social dualisms that feminists have faulted for funding a patriarchy in which active, strong, independent traits are associated with men and passive, weak, dependent traits are associated with women. Barth transfers the qualitative distinction he finds between God and humanity to the difference between the sexes, and the result is an ordering of sequence in which both sexes are supposed to have equal dignity but men share the initiative of Christ while women share the response of disciples. Some defenders of

We arrive then at an impasse. Either critics turn their backs on the systemic patriarchy of Barth's entire dogmatic project, which compromises even the most traditionally egalitarian of relations—that between the persons of the Trinity. Or they secure a corrective that would require a daunting reconstructive project from the top down: an overhaul of his christocentric doctrine of election that must carefully distinguish immanent from economic trinities, and a reconstruction of his theological anthropology upon a trinitarian rather than a christological center.

It is my contention that this impasse is reached through a distorting emphasis upon the *ordering* of the relationships that Barth describes. In much of the literature I have discussed here, the examination of the ordering of central relationships in Barth's *Dogmatics* is undertaken at the expense of an adequate grasp on Barth's understanding of human agency operative in these relationships. With their sights set on "order" as it is instantiated in these many relationships, critics tend to approach Barth's dogmatic project as a network of analogous, asymmetrical, dyads consisting of first and second actors (leaders and followers): they assume rather than question whether Barth has more than one account of human agency, and they question the ways in which he grounds these different types of actors (leaders and followers) in his analogy of relations. Instead of tracking an analogous pattern of ordering in various relationships, I will look instead at the ways in which Barth depicts human agency as a response to a pattern of relationship

Barth's account of sexual difference offer similar arguments to these critics insofar as they draw attention to a pervasive pattern of order, which they embrace rather than oppose. They trace an order of sequence and origin through multiple relations all the way up the ontological ladder to the eternal trinitarian relation between the begetting Father and begotten Son, although they try to find ways to soften (if not completely ignore) the implications this ordering has for the interactions between the sexes: Robert Osborn, "Man and/or Woman according to Karl Barth," in *Theology and Corporate Conscience: Essays in Honor of Frederick Herzog*, ed. Douglas Meeks, et al. (Minneapolis: Kirk House, 1999); Gary W. Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations: Trinitarian, Christological, and Human: Towards an Ethic of the Family* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999); Christopher Chenault Roberts, *Creation and Covenant: The Significance of Sexual Difference in the Moral Theology of Marriage* (London: T&T Clark, 2007).

constituting activity that calls human beings into existence as responsive and responsible actors, setting them on the path toward finding aid in, and lending aid to, their human neighbors. We will see that because of his christocentric commitments Barth's theological anthropology offers only one, christologically informed, account of what the human agent is and does. I will argue that Barth's privileging of male actors is not the symptom of a pervasive asymmetrical ordering but rather the consequence of his refusal to allow women to fully appropriate the only model of human agency he has: a pattern of activity that he carefully crafts as an imitative response to Christ's activity for and on behalf of humankind. Thus while Barth claims that women are fully functioning human agents, his efforts to subordinate their activity to male activity contradicts this claim by setting ambiguous and ultimately unlivable constraints upon the female agent.

By attending carefully to Barth's christologically funded construal of human agency, I argue that the critical corrective to Barth's gender trouble is far closer to home than his more generous critics realize, and it does not demand an extensive trinitarian overhaul of his anthropology from the top down. The human agent at the heart of his christocentric theological anthropology cannot support his efforts to restrain women in a subordinate relation to men. My claim is that, far from being the pervasive and unavoidable outcome of an overwhelming divine actor incarnated in Christ, Barth's ordering of the sexes cannot cohere with his account of human agency and ethical responsibility that is carefully crafted after the gracious aid-lending self-revelatory activity of the incarnate Christ. I argue that Barth's understanding of human agency itself provides a corrective that lends itself to critical and performative accounts of sexual difference that resonate with some contemporary currents in gender theory.

For the last two to three decades, several developments in scholarship on Barth have opened space for a fresh inquiry into Barth's account of sexual difference. Most of the literature

on sexual difference either precedes or does not engage these developments. First, a growing line of scholarship has turned attention to Barth's understanding of human agency and has refuted the suspicion (echoed in much of the literature on his account of sexual difference) that Barth's divine actor overwhelms and eviscerates a passive human agent at every register of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*: revelation, christology, theological anthropology, and ethics. Barth's career-long emphasis upon the human being's utter incapacity for the saving knowledge and redemptive work of God, along with his depiction of that divine work as a miraculous activity that makes possible the humanly impossible, has evoked the criticism that his human agent is the passive object of divine manipulation. Over the past couple of decades, however, a series of monographs have examined the space that Barth's christocentric account of divine activity clears for human agency, while some have read *Church Dogmatics* as a moral theology exhibiting a robust and multifaceted concern with the human agent.⁷

⁷ This recent literature resists an earlier view that for Barth God alone is the acting subject and the human being, as object of this activity, is the passive recipient of divine self-disclosure--a suspicion contributing to a lack of interest in Barth's ethics (Richard Roberts, *A Theology on its Way? Essays on Karl Barth* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991]; John Macken, *The Autonomy Theme in the 'Church Dogmatics': Karl Barth and His Critics* [Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1990]; Robert Willis, *The Ethics of Karl Barth* [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971]). Scholarship on Barth's ethics and human agency took a more receptive and positive turn when it began to consider how Barth's understanding of divine being and activity cleared space for a particular account of ethical agency. Since then a series of monographs have established Barth as an important moral theologian by exploring Barth's understanding of human agency, ethics, and the close relationship Barth maintains between dogmatics and ethics. This scholarship has refuted a number of once widely held misperceptions: that his emphasis upon divine gracious activity leaves no place for human action, that his christology absorbs anthropology and ethics, and that his divine command ethics is voluntarist, occasionalist, and individualistic: Paul D. Matheny, *Dogmatics and Ethics: The Theological Realism and Ethics of Karl Barth's 'Church Dogmatics'* (Peter Lang: Frankfurt, 1990); John Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1995); Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998); Timothy J. Gorringer, *Against Hegemony*; Paul Nimmo, *Being in Action: The Theological Shape of Barth's Ethical Vision* (London: T&T Clark, 2007); Gerald P. McKenny, *The Analogy of Grace: Karl Barth's Moral Theology* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2010); David Clough, *Ethics in Crisis: Interpreting Barth's Ethics* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Archibald James Spencer, *Clearing a Space for Human Action: Ethical Ontology in the Theology of Karl Barth* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003); Frank Jehle, *Ever against the Stream*, trans. Richard and Martha Burnett (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Joseph L. Mangina, *Karl Barth on the Christian Life: The Practical Knowledge of God* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001); William Werpehowski, *Karl Barth and Christian Ethics: Living in Truth* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014). For a discussion of the earlier negative readings of Barth's ethics and the common misperceptions see Nimmo, *Being in Action*, 2-4; Nigel Biggar, *The Hastening that Waits: Karl Barth's Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 19-25; Webster, *Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1995), 5-8; and McKenny, *Analogy of Grace*, 292-4.

This trajectory of scholarship exposes the need for a reading of Barth's account of sexual difference that is especially attentive to his depiction of human agency, its christological shape, and the intimate relationship he maintains between dogmatics and ethics. While much of this literature acknowledges the central site the relationship between the sexes occupies in his ethics, none undertakes a substantial critique of its heterosexist and heteronormative features. My project thus contributes to this literature by exposing the problems in his account of sexual difference and locating resources in his construal of agency that resist his sexism and heterosexism.⁸

⁸ Several works in this line of scholarship are especially helpful in providing the agential and ethical backdrop to my project. Webster has famously argued that the failure to accept and investigate Barth's claim that dogmatics is necessarily ethical has resulted in inadequate readings that fail to appreciate Barth's work as, among other things, a moral ontology, "an extensive account of the situation in which human agents act" (Webster, *Ethics of Reconciliation*, 1). Barth decenters human activity, pushing aside focus on moral selfhood in order to give an account of the moral life as genuine action. The agent is enclosed and governed by the creative, redemptive and sanctifying work of God in Christ, and good action is action that conforms to prior divine action. Since the human being is characterized by good action, if dogmatics is to witness to the action of God and its goodness, it will have the problem of ethics in view from the beginning (2-4). This point will prove important when looking at the ethical dimensions of Barth's depiction of sexual difference.

Nimmo examines the actualistic ontology of Barth's ethical agent. He attends to the christological derivation of theological anthropology and its roots in Barth's doctrine of election. God's eternal election to be for and with humanity in Jesus Christ binds the humanity of Jesus in an eternal relation with the Son, and secures the human existence of Jesus as the *imago Dei*, the repetition and reflection of God's eternal electing being-in-action. Nimmo underscores Barth's actualistic construal of Christ's humanity and of the likeness of the human agent to the *imago Dei* as it acts in conformity to Christ's gracious activity. He shows that the actualistic character of Barth's analogy of relations (as an analogy of events and activity) centers upon the repetition and reflection of a christological activity playing out in intra-divine and intra-creaturely spheres. Jesus is the central agent, wholly determined by a human "Thou" whose existence is analogous to Christ's human existence. Human agents are conformed to the image of God as they act analogously to Christ's saving activity on their behalf. This point will prove significant in exposing the limitations of reconstructive interventions that wants to leap back over Barth's doctrine of election to connect the *imago Dei* of the relation between men and women directly to an immanent trinitarian relationship between Father and Son, as if it were uncomplicated by the eternal union of the Son to the human existence and agency of Jesus Christ. Nimmo notes that the *imago Dei* is this saving activity of Christ, and the ethical agent is called to bring itself into conformity with this image through its own decision and action. The ethical agent is eccentric, with its center outside itself in divine and human others. It exists in motion, as it acts in response to and conformity with the gracious activity of God (Nimmo, *Being in Action*, 87-109). I will look at how this imitation of Christ's saving activity plays out in Barth's depiction of the agent's relation to the human other and to the sexually differentiated human other. I will be especially attentive to the actualism of Barth's ontology, as this is expressed in the divine call to a ceaseless activity for and on behalf of other humans.

McKenny studies human ethical activity as an analogy to God's gracious activity revealed and accomplished in the saving work of Christ. He looks at Barth's construal of God's gracious activity on our behalf as an interruption of our own moral striving that calls us into question while summoning us to pattern our activity after God's gracious activity (*Analogy of Grace*, 21). He tracks Barth's developing attempt, over the course of his career, to address the question of how a grace that only comes to us in radical discontinuity with our moral

While this body of literature draws attention to the interconnection Barth maintains between dogmatics and ethics, few have noted the rhetorical and performative strategies Barth uses to model for and elicit from his readers the orientation toward divine and creaturely others that is so central to his understanding of human agency.⁹ I will approach *Church Dogmatics* as a

striving, can be expressed in human conduct in the world without assimilating the good to the human moral subject (27). McKenny's work is especially helpful in examining Barth's efforts to secure a place for the deliberation, judgment, and decision of moral agents as they discern and identify a particular action or course of action that corresponds to the gracious action of God. He looks at the role that a practice of ethical reflection and ethical inquiry finds in Barth's special ethics. While he does not directly address the problems in Barth's ethics of sexual difference, his study is especially informative for understanding what Barth is attempting to prescribe when he discusses sexual difference and the relation between the sexes in his special ethics of creation in III/4, §54, and when he calls for a critical relationship to the social customs and mores through which sexual difference is expressed.

Paul Dafydd Jones (*The Humanity of Christ: Christology in Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* [London: T&T Clark, 2008]) has secured the christological ground for this literature on ethics and for my own project by exploring Barth's construal of Christ as "a human who lives and acts in 'correspondence' to God's prevenient direction" (5). Jones's monograph refutes the common charge that Barth's high christology, with its emphasis upon the divinity of Christ, enfeebles Christ's humanity (3-4). Although I will attend closely to the function of Christ's saving activity in Barth's construal of the human agent, I will not have space for a careful assessment of Barth's understanding of Christ's human agency. In Chapter 4 I attend carefully to the christological sections of III/2 that shape Barth's depiction of human agency as a response to and imitation of Christ's saving activity. However, in these sections Barth does not discuss Christ's human will, activity, and decision in detail, but he focuses instead on the ways in which Christ, as the incarnate divine address to humankind, constitutes human agents, calling them into existence as grateful recipients of divine grace and directing them to an imitative aid-lending activity on behalf of their human fellows. Jones notes the limited attention III/2 gives specifically to Christ's human existence and the surprising brevity of the sections devoted to christology in this part-volume (117-9). He paints a broader picture of the ontological and agential complexity of Christ by drawing on Barth's doctrine of election in II/2 (see 60-116) and his discussion of Christ's human existence in CD IV (especial §59; see Jones 203-244). He explains that in Barth's christocentric reformulation of a reformed doctrine of election, the electing God binds the human existence and agency of Christ eternally to the triune Son. The divine being-in-act constitutive of the person of Jesus Christ is the divine Son, and so the presence and prevenient direction of God qua Son defines Christ's entire being: the divine Son is the person of Jesus Christ, the principal agent in the life of the individual human that he assumes into union with himself (85-6). Yet while Christ's human activity is framed and determined by the divine electing activity, God wills to secure an autonomous creaturely other in this one human being, to whom God grants space to live an existence in confrontation to the divine will and address (91). In time and space Christ humanly realizes his elect identity by learning obedience to the will of God--through his human will, judgment and decision he acts in conformity with his divine will (98-99). Thus Jesus Christ is the God who elects the human Jesus through whom to establish fellowship with the creaturely other, and Jesus Christ is also the elected human who exemplifies the proper human response to God's election in his life and activity, which is performed on behalf of his human others (103-4). Jones's work shows Barth's robust account of Christ's human existence as a model agent. My project will attend to some of the biblical figures and images that Barth patterns after this activity. Barth uses such figures as mirrors in which readers are to see themselves reflected: exposed as sinners who do not conform to the image and at the same time the gracious recipients of Christ's saving activity, called to respond by bringing their activity into conformity with Christ's activity as they turn to lend aid to their fellow creatures.

⁹ Stephen H. Webb provides a sustained treatment of the rhetorical features of the second edition of Barth's commentary on Romans which includes a discussion of the commentary's ethical sections where Barth's construal of the alterity of the neighbor in relation to divine alterity has affinities with §18 (*Re-Figuring Theology*, 168-77). I share with Webb an interest in the rhetorical strategies that Barth uses to discursively enact the situation of the human agent. While Webb's focus is Barth's earlier work he does note differences between that earlier work and the

formative textual practice, a pedagogical exercise, in which Barth both prescribes and attempts to model for his readers the orientation and dispositions proper for responding to and re-describing the divine and creaturely “others” encountered within and beyond Christian discourse. This performance functions to assist writer and reader together in the unlearning of modern intellectual habits that Barth finds problematic. He will rhetorically perform for the reader the sort of orientation to the voices of divine and human others that he describes in his theological anthropology of III/2 and prescribes in his ethics of III/4. A pattern of human agency will come into view as a response to the divine and creaturely others witnessed to in the human words of Scriptures and reflected upon in theology and preaching. By exposing the performative dimensions of Barth’s dogmatic practice I will be in a better position to foreground his use of biblical figures and characters to model for his reader a pattern of activity they are to emulate. This will become especially important for understanding the problems that emerge when Barth genders this pattern of activity in his ethics of sexual difference.

Second, a lively ongoing debate over the trinitarian implications of Barth’s reformulation of the doctrine of election in *Church Dogmatics* II [§§32-35] has produced a consensus among Barth scholars that after II/2 Barth’s references to the immanent Trinity serve a limited methodological function, while some argue these references have no function at all. Scholars disagree over the extent to which this limited function obviates Barth’s earlier depiction of the immanent Trinity in the opening volume. Some prominent interpreters have argued that after II/2, the ontological identity of the Son is always already complicated by the eternal decree that unites the Son to the human nature of Jesus Christ. As a consequence, after II/2 it becomes very

style of *Church Dogmatics*, and he offers an illuminating discussion of similarities between Barth’s dogmatics and the literary genre of realism emerging in the 19th century in reaction to Romanticism (154-65).

difficult to talk about the immanent relationship between Father and Son apart from any consideration of God's eternal decision to establish a relationship with the creature.¹⁰

For the purposes of my project, this debate has exposed the deep doctrinal and methodological significance of Barth's decision in III/2 to build theological anthropology upon christology (and not upon immanent trinitarian activity). Barth's depiction of the immanent trinitarian relationship in first volume of *Church Dogmatics* may well be a helpful resources for imagining egalitarian exchanges between human beings, However, this debate shows that his appeals to an analogy between inter-human fellowship and inter-divine fellowship is deeply shaped by what Bruce McCormack has described as the solidification of Barth's "christocentric concertation," which begins in II/1 and drives his modification of his doctrine of election to center on the election of Christ rather than the election of individuals. Barth's reformulation of the doctrine of election in II/2 functions henceforth as a "regulative principle," that secures Christ (both the subject and object of God's election) as the controlling center of all Barth's subsequent work.¹¹ This debate exposes the restricted methodological function of the immanent Trinity in Barth's later volumes. It problematizes the assumption of an ontological homogeneity in the immanent Trinity, which underlies much of the literature that proposes a trinitarian fix to

¹⁰ For a synopsis of this debate (which I address in Chapter Four) and a selection of key contributions (including essays by Bruce McCormack, Paul Molnar, Kevin Hector, George Hunsinger, Paul Dafydd Jones, and Paul Nimmo) see Michael T. Dempsey, ed., *Trinity and Election in Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011). See also Bruce McCormack, "Grace & Being: The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology," in *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008); McCormack, "The Ontological Presuppositions of Barth's Doctrine of the Atonement," in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical and Practical Perspectives: Essays in Honor of Roger R. Nicole*, ed. Charles E. Hall and Frank A James III (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 346-66; McCormack, "Seek God Where He May Be Found: A Response to Edwin Chr. van Driel," *SJT* 60, no.1 (2007): 62-79; Nimmo, *Being in Action*, 4-12; Matthias Gockel, *Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election: A Systematic-Theological Comparison* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2006), 158-97; Jones, *Humanity of Christ*, 60-116; George Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity: A Hermeneutical Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015); Paul Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 60-4.

¹¹ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909-1936* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1995), 20-23, 453-8.

Barth's ordering of sexual difference. This christocentric concentration and the regulative impact of his reformulation of the doctrine of election will support my claim that Barth offers only one pattern of human agency for all humans to appropriate, performed by Christ who is eternally bound by election to the second person of the Trinity. The problem with Barth's ordering of the sexes is not, then, that he directs males to imitate the humanward activity of God and females to imitate the Godward activity of humans, as many suspect. Rather the problem is that, whenever Barth attempts to order the relation between the sexes, he turns his singular account of human agency, together with its ethical impulse, into a male prerogative, and consequently eviscerates the would-be female agent.

Third, Barth's heteronormative framing of inter-human fellowship has only recently come under scrutiny. Most of the critics I note above praise Barth for giving the relationship between the sexes so central a role for human existence--understood as a being-in-relationship. They appreciate his affiliation of this particular relationship with the *imago Dei*, for he thereby includes women within the *imago Dei*, fosters a constructive and positive approach to sexual identity and desire, while resisting a tradition that depicts woman as a lesser version of man. Several critics have now problematized Barth's heteronormative framing of inter-human fellowship. His complementarian account of sexual difference and the central place it occupies in his theological anthropology underlie his depiction of homosexual relationships as the pathological, isolated, self-loving rejection of the human "other." This new trajectory of critique exposes the need for an analysis of Barth's elevation of sexual difference itself to the primary site of inter-human alterity. Barth's christocentric account of human agency will aid my critique of this move, and I will expose the trouble the biblical figure of the unmarried Christ causes for Barth's account. Because Christ serves for Barth as the central paradigm for human agency and

thus for inter-human fellowship, he must also serve as the central paradigm for the sexually differentiated self, and thus Christ's unmarried status and his close relationship to a circle of twelve men is at odds with Barth's efforts to depict human existence as fully actualized in a relationship with one person of the opposite sex. I will draw on some of the images he offers of Christ's relationship to others that can aid in decentering the heterosexual marital relationship and can support a diverse range of relationships and social organizations. I will draw on his account of the fluidity and relativity of ethnic difference to imagine how sexual difference might have functioned in his theological anthropology had he not succumbed to a romantic mystification of the difference between the sexes.¹²

¹² Several publications have worked to unsettle the heteronormativity of Barth's theological anthropology and ethics on his own terms. Eugene Rogers (*Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune Life* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1999]), conducts a book-length interrogation of Barth's heteronormative depiction of human existence, which he finds to be the strongest theological account of the complementarity of the sexes there is. He wants to preserve Barth's use of the Pauline symbology that finds in the love of Christ for the church a model of marriage, while freeing Barth's depiction of co-humanity from compulsory complementarity (141-7). Like many of the other critics I note above, he is especially critical of Barth's use of dyadic relational structures, and he worries that Barth exhibits a preference for binary relations that distorts his reading of biblical narratives by effacing the role that third parties play. He argues that because of this compulsory complementarity Barth's account of human fellowship loses its christological (and narrational) moorings to a binary relationship. He argues that more must be made of Christ's celibate state than Barth is willing to make. He questions Barth's selection of biblical narratives for exemplars of co-humanity, the Adam and Eve scene in Gen. 2 above all. He finds resources in other narratives that show co-humanity between the same sex. He focuses specifically on Barth's Gentile and Jew and his male and female binaries. He argues that Barth hides real Jews and women behind projections (143): Jews become the observable and effective representative of the human predicament and homosexuals becomes the observable and effective representative of sin, qua Rom. 1 (154). Rogers argues that had Barth not been so fixed on establishing a basis for compulsory heterosexuality, he might have configured the I/Thou relation not as a binary but as the condition for the variety of relationships that Christ enacted (180-91). I share this criticism with Rogers, and I will expose the christological dimensions of his depiction of I/Thou relations in §45.

Jaime Ronaldo Balboa ("Church Dogmatics," Natural Theology, and the Slippery Slope of '*Geschlecht*': A Constructivist-Gay Liberationist Reading of Barth," *JAAR* 66, no.4 [Winter 1998]: 771-789) focuses on Barth's brief discussion of homosexuality in his special ethics. Balboa argues that Barth's construal of sexual difference rests upon natural categories (i.e. the naturally sexed body desiring in a specific direction), and that in this respect he resorts to the sort of natural theology he persistently rejected. I agree with this criticism and will point to Barth's recurring mystification of sexual difference.

Graham Ward ("The Erotics of Redemption: After Karl Barth," *Theology & Sexuality* 8 [March, 1998]: 52-72) likewise faults Barth for reifying naturalistic observations and premises in his account of sexual difference. Ward argues that sexual difference remains a highly unstable site in Barth's analogy of relations. Barth does not succeed in providing an account of sexual difference but instead produces an economy of the same in which woman serves the narcissistic project of reflecting man's image, and Barth's reading of the Adam-Eve scene of recognition enacts this economy. Ward, like others, locates a critical corrective in Barth's immanent trinitarian relations. There he finds an alternate economy of desire where encounter with alterity is expressed in a kenotic outpouring of self-giving love that exposes the problematic character of the economy of desire enacted by Adam: an economy based on

In the following chapters I look at Barth's depiction of the self's orientation to the human other as a grateful and imitative response to the gratuitous saving work of Christ. The human agent emerges in Barth's *Dogmatics* as the recipient of an unrepayable gift from the divine benefactor, and this gift imposes the obligation of a modest imitative activity that turns to lend aid to the human other and to a wider sphere of creaturely others. In its orientation toward the human other, the agent not only imitates the divine gracious aid actualized in Jesus Christ, but also recognizes its own need for that same gratuitous aid from its fellow humans. This recognition of a shared dependency with the other and shared responsibility for the needs of the other, and above all the obligation to act on behalf of the other, will be key to understanding the ethical dimensions of inter-human fellowship and the problems in Barth's depiction of sexual difference.

In Chapter One I foreground the features of this pattern of human agency in Barth's discussion of the ethical character of dogmatic activity, found in I/1, §18, at the heart of his prolegomena to the *Church Dogmatics*. He uses the two commandments (love of God and love of neighbor) to frame his discussion, and the parable of the Good Samaritan provides the biblical template with which to reflect upon the ethical relationship of Christians to their neighbors. The analogy between love of God and love of neighbor will be a recurring theme in Barth's depictions of inter-human relations. In §18 Barth does not situate inter-human fellowship in a heteronormative marital framework, and so in my subsequent chapters this account is a helpful resource for exposing the problems that arise when the "other" is a female human being.

lack, demand, and possession. Ward wants a single erotic economy that is not plagued by notions of complementarity and hierarchy and one that is open to same-sex erotic partnerships. While I share these aims with Ward I find that the erotic economy that Ward appreciates does not drive the trinitarian relations alone but fuels his "analogy of relations" for it drives the movement of the incarnate Son toward creation. I will show in my third chapter that this economy drives his reading of Genesis 2, but seizes up with the arrival of Eve; it also drives his depiction of human agency in III/2 but again seizes up with the introduction of sexual difference and its order.

Chapter Two turns to Barth's doctrine of creation in III/1, and I focus on his use of the Genesis 1 creation narrative to secure a christological framework for understanding the agent's relationship to multiple sites of creaturely alterity. I examine the relation he constructs between myth and maternity in his reading of Genesis 1, in particular his claim that this biblical narrative affiliates maternal imagery with a mythical cosmology that it rejects. Scholars have recognized in this claim a critical rejection of Nazi ideology's mythological interest in associations between earth and maternity. I argue that Barth's assumptions about a feminine passivity play an important role in his aversion to maternal imagery, and these same assumptions trouble all his efforts to order the relationship between women and men.

Continuing to focus on Barth's use of the Genesis creation narratives to locate his human agent, in Chapter Three I turn to his reading of Genesis 2. In the figure of Adam Barth situates the human being as the beneficiary of the many gifts of God, mediated through the activity of multiple creaturely others. Eve is the final, climactic divine gift of a human partner in whom Adam can recognize one both like and unlike himself. I argue that assumptions about feminine passivity continue to trouble his reading. While he depicts Adam's creaturely others (earth, water, mist, plant life) as co-workers whose activity is a gratuitous service to Adam, Barth depicts Eve as silent and immobile: she renders her service by saying and doing nothing at all. In the figures of the seeking, choosing, and speaking Adam and the silent immobile Eve Barth gives us the biblical template for the problems that plague his future discussion of the relationship between the sexes. He secures for men a prerogative that costs women the driving force of human agency as Barth construes it—its spontaneous ethical impulse.

Chapter Four turns to Barth's theological anthropology of III/2. He patterns his account of human agency after the relational activity that the incarnate Christ performs for humankind.

His anthropological agent is constituted by and in response to this christological activity. Christ the Good Samaritan reappears here calling the human beneficiaries of this gracious activity, to “Go and do likewise”—to conform themselves to Christ’s activity in a gratuitous, spontaneous movement toward the needy other, in whom they must also recognize their own need. To be human is to be the beneficiary of Christ’s saving work, who turns to lend aid to the human other. I argue that when Barth introduces the topic of sexual difference into his anthropology, this Christ-imitating pattern of human agency becomes a male prerogative. The would-be female agent is left without christological and ethical moorings.

Chapter Five turns to Barth’s discussion of sexual difference in his special ethics of creation, found in III/4, §54. In this chapter I interrogate and unsettle the place that sexual difference occupies in the regulation and ordering of inter-human fellowship. I argue that Barth’s efforts to integrate the unmarried Christ into his heteronormative framework expose the tenuous grounds upon which he connects his understanding of sexual difference to his broader christocentric project. While Barth configures sexual difference as an oppositional division that must be carefully policed and maintained, Barth calls for a critical relationship to norms, customs and social mores. I argue that this critical relationship opens up space within Barth’s heteronormative matrix for performances that unsettle, subvert, and transgress the reputedly unambiguous dividing line between the sexes that these norms instantiate.

CHAPTER ONE

PLAYING THE NEIGHBOR IN AN ORDER OF PRAISE: AN ETHIC FOR DOGMATICS

Toward the end of the opening volume of *Church Dogmatics* (its lengthy prolegomenon) Barth presents his first extensive consideration of ethics (I/2, §18 “The Life of the Children of God”).¹ He focuses on the ethical dimensions of theological practice and specifically the obligation that the human other (the “neighbor”) imposes on the self. For my purposes, Barth’s treatment of ethics in §18 is especially noteworthy in that it presents an intersubjective relational model that is *not* situated within the heteronormative marital framework that, in later volumes, becomes paradigmatic for Barth’s understanding of inter-human alterity and ethical duty. In fact, Barth explicitly rejects the sort of framework that would enable him to do so. He refuses to articulate his account within a Lutheran doctrine of the “orders of creation” that many of his contemporaries were using in their ethical projects to describe the duty that the neighbor imposes on the self. The “orders of creation” refers to patterns and institutions of social life that are said to be universally evident throughout human history and divinely ordained for the organization of human society. Marriage was included among these orders. Refusing this framework, Barth instead draws on sacramental language to situate his ethical depiction of the neighbor within a christological and revelatory framework that turns on a dialectical relationship between gospel and law. For Barth, the neighbor acquires “sacramental significance” by pointing to the grace of

¹ In this chapter, quotations and references to *Church Dogmatics* I/2 are cited in the body of the main text, without reference to volume and part-volume. When referring to other part-volumes, volume number and part-volume number will precede the page number. The first page number refers to the English translation of *Church Dogmatics*. When I refer to the German original, a second page number is positioned after a forward slash. For clarity within the notes, I occasionally use the annotation *KD* when referring to the German text, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, and *CD* when referring to the English translation, *Church Dogmatics*.

Christ and inciting the self to conform to Christ's aid lending activity (436).² As we shall see, Barth puts this dialectic of gospel and law to work in subtly subversive ways. *Church Dogmatics* I/2, the part-volume in which §18 is located, was completed in 1937 and thus reflects Barth's activity and involvement in the divisions and debates of the Protestant German churches in the early 1930s. My intent is to expose the ways in which his construal of the neighbor gestures to and resists antisemitic arguments that excluded Jews from the German churches, arguments that appealed to the "orders of creation."³

² In this chapter I point to the strategic and selective way in which Barth uses sacramental language to describe the neighbor. His configuration of the neighbor as a sacramental event is very much in keeping with the central commitments of his doctrine of revelation, wherein God reveals Godself through creaturely media that have no capacity in themselves for the miraculous revelatory work God does through them. W. Travis McMaken (*The Sign of the Gospel: Toward an Evangelical Doctrine of Infant Baptism after Karl Barth* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013]) observes a lack of precision in Barth's use of the language of sacrament and notes that Barth often uses the language generally to refer to the intersection of divine and human action in a revealing and reconciling event (186-7). Barth's reference to the neighbor as a sacramental event in §18 has this general sense and is oriented specifically to designate the event in which divine revelatory activity, mediated through a creaturely medium, enables a human response of faith. See McMaken for an account of how Barth's christological modification of a traditional reformed doctrine of double election in *CD* II/2 shapes his understanding of the sacraments in future volumes. Barth's view of the sacraments, and especially his view of baptism, changed toward the end of the 1930s as he grappled with the doctrine of election, and the change was first evident in a lecture delivered in 1943. Barth's writing of §18 precedes this change and so was undertaken at a time in which he shared a broad continuity with the reformed tradition on sacraments. With his radical reformulation of the doctrine of election, Barth will eventually reject a sacramental soteriology wherein the salvation accomplished in Christ must be applied to human individuals at a subsequent event mediated through the sacraments. Because Christ's work is completely efficacious in itself it requires no human mediation whether in baptism or faith, and this means that even the reformed emphasis on the role of sacraments in confirming one's faith is misguided (see McMaken, 32-8, 59-88).

³ §18 remains relatively neglected in scholarship on Barth. Scholars who attend carefully to the ecclesial and political context of Barth's ethical work in the 1930s, specifically as it concerns his antisemitism, have not looked carefully at §18 (see for example Gorringe, *Against Hegemony*, and Carys Moseley, *Nations and Nationalism in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2013). The most sustained treatments of §18 are found in Paul D. Molnar, "Love of God and Love of Neighbor in the Theology of Karl Rahner and Karl Barth," *Modern Theology* 20, no.4 (October 2004): 567-599; David Clough, *Ethics in Crisis*, 84ff; John N. Sheveland, *Piety and Responsibility: Patterns of Unity in Karl Rahner, Karl Barth, and Vedanta Desika* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 59-110. However these treatments are primarily concerned with the way Barth conceptualizes the relationship between the two commandments, and Molnar and Sheveland are occupied with comparing Barth with Rahner on this point. These three assessments do not situate the paragraph in its sociopolitical context, nor do they attend to the rhetorical and formative features that I address in this chapter. Sheveland, who provides the most extensive treatment of the paragraph, shares my interest in the epistemic virtues of theological practice that Barth articulates here. However, in comparing §18 with Barth's account of interpersonal relations in *Church Dogmatics* III/2, §45.2, he is disappointed by what he considers to be Barth's excessive attention to methodological issues, the nature of revelation, and those positions he rejects, all at the expense of praxis and a concern for "the performative content" of love for neighbor (78). Furthermore, Sheveland finds in §18 "a weak appreciation of interpersonal responsibility and love," which he suspects is the consequence of Barth's annexing of neighbor-love to doxological concerns (93). The reading I advance in this chapter recognizes that §18 is constrained by its function within Barth's prolegomenon to prescribe

In subsequent chapters, we will see that in the third volume of *Church Dogmatics* Barth depicts the self's relationship to the sexually differentiated other in a similar way, although sacramental terminology falls away. Barth continues to depict the human other as a benefactor whose gift imposes upon the self the obligation to respond in kind. In this function the human other unsettles, humbles, and de-centers the human subject, re-directing the self to Christ the benefactor, whose saving activity is the embodiment of both gospel and law. In subsequent chapters, I will argue that Barth constructs a feminine other later on in *Church Dogmatics* to perform this function of unsettling, de-centering, and humbling the masculine subject. However, his efforts to subordinate her to the male subject undermine this function, with extremely problematic agential consequences for those who are to conform themselves to the model of feminine agency that he will prescribe.

In the current chapter, I first situate Barth's ethical discussion of §18 in its polemical context of the German Church crisis of the early 1930s, drawing attention especially to the way appeals to the "orders of creation" were used in arguments for the exclusion of Jews from the life of German churches. I then turn to Barth's use of the parable of the Good Samaritan for his sacramental configuration of neighbor-love as the outer sign of the inner reality that is the love of God. Finally, I highlight the ways in which his strategic use of sacramental language for depicting the ethical dimensions of neighbor-love subverts the terms of these ecclesial debates. I also gesture to the subversive function that this account will have for my own critical analysis of Barth's construction of feminine alterity in the following chapters.

the nature, task and method of dogmatics: it is thus specifically the ethical responsibility of the theological practitioner that Barth has in view here. I will demonstrate that in the immediate polemical context in which Barth was immersed at the time that he was preparing this part-volume, the ethical responsibility of his contemporary ministers, theologians and biblical scholars, specifically for the plight of the Jews in church and society, was a very urgent issue for Barth, and I will note the ways in which §18 reflects this urgency. Barth's understanding of revelation is crucial to his account of the ethical responsibility of Christians for the church's apparent outsiders.

THE ORDERS OF CREATION

In §18, Barth's depiction of the self's relation to divine and human others refuses any appeal to an orders of creation framework for understanding ethical obligation. However, Barth devotes very little space to explaining his rejection of that framework, presenting it briefly as but one among other misguided approaches. For a reader unfamiliar with the polemical context in which Barth was immersed while writing this part-volume, his minimal attention to the orders of creation might suggest that it was merely a marginal issue for Barth. However, such a show of disinterest is a rhetorical strategy that Barth frequently uses in *Church Dogmatics* for dealing with those theological methods and sources that he rejects: he attends to them only long enough to explain why they should not occupy the attention of the theologian and reader, and in so doing he enacts for the reader the sort of conceptual orientation and focus within ecclesial discourses that he finds proper for the doing of theology.⁴

In order to foreground the subtle ways in which Barth's account of moral responsibility destabilizes and reworks the terms and assumptions in contemporaneous appeals to the orders of creation, I will take a brief detour through Barth's public role in the highly charged conflict between the Confessing Church and the German Christians in the early 1930s, as the ideology of National Socialism pervaded German society. Barth's role in this history has and continues to be

⁴ In Barth's 1934 response to Brunner's critique of Barth's rejection of natural theology Barth indicates that this is indeed a strategy he uses ("No!" in *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace," by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the reply "No!" by Dr. Karl Barth*, trans. Peter Fraenkel (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002). He problematizes Brunner's attempt in "Nature and Grace" to give a systematic presentation of Barth's objections to natural theology in the form of six theses. Barth responds that he has no interest in advancing any systematic reflection on natural theology, even in the negative form of a rejection, for to do so is to lose sight of theology's proper object and so to cease doing theology. He writes: "For 'natural theology' does not exist as an entity capable of becoming a separate subject within what I consider to be real theology—not even for the sake of being rejected. If one occupies oneself with real theology one can pass by so-called natural theology only as one would pass by an abyss into which it is inadvisable to step if one does not want to fall. All one can do is to turn one's back upon it as upon the great temptation and source of error, by having nothing to do with it and by making it clear to oneself and to others from time to time why one acts that way" ("No!" in *Natural Theology*, 74-5). He continues, "If you really reject natural theology you do not stare at the serpent, with the result that it stares back at you, hypnotises you, and is ultimately certain to bite you, but you hit it and kill it as soon as you see it!" (76).

carefully studied, criticized, and defended. It is well-known that within this weighty context Barth came to adamantly reject the orders of creation, which his closest colleagues were using and which Barth himself, a decade earlier, had appropriated. I will briefly rehearse key features of this polemical backdrop in order to better expose what is at stake for Barth's rejection of an orders of creation approach to ethics and his fleeting references in §18 to neighbor-love as a sacramental event, an outer sign of an inner reality. As we shall see, his underdeveloped use of this sacramental terminology is most striking when recognized as Barth's resistance to contentious opinions within the German Protestant churches in the 1930s over the status of Jewish Christians. The orders of creation and the sacraments were set in contrast over the question of whether the sacramental efficacy of baptism overrides those ethnic differences that many argued were grounded in the divinely created ordinance of the Volk. Some of the key theological commitments Barth publicly expresses elsewhere in his criticism of both the German Christians and his own colleagues are echoed in §18 (albeit not explicitly declared); the ecclesial-political crisis of the German churches in the 1930s lends an urgency to these commitments that underwrites his exposition, yet never surfaces explicitly.

With this backdrop in view, I will argue that Barth's construal of the neighbor is a critical unsettling, reorientation, and reorganization of central themes and terms of these ecclesial discussions. Barth subverts and reworks the central terms of the orders of creation debate by configuring the encounter with the neighbor as a sacramental event that overrides the many ways in which we differentiate ourselves from others. Barth's description of the neighbor locates every human being within the ethical ambit and the liturgical and missional life of the church. While religious and ethnic differences are those orders of creation that Barth has primarily in view in §18, we shall see that sexual difference was also a key component in the ecclesial polemics of

that time, although Barth does not give it sustained attention here. In the following chapters I expose the full destabilizing implications of Barth's depiction of the neighbor in §18 for Barth's own ordering of sexual differences later on in *Church Dogmatics* III.

The doctrine of the orders of creation (referred to in a variety of ways: "orders of preservation," "orders of existence," etc.) gained momentum as a viable ethical framework in the 1920s and 1930s. The doctrine was the product of a nineteenth-century German Lutheran appropriation of Luther's doctrine of the "three estates" (*oeconomia, politia, ecclesia*) and his doctrine of two kingdoms.⁵ Its various iterations enshrined Luther's dialectic of law and gospel in a dualist ethic that distinguished the will of God knowable in creation from God's will as revealed in Christ. All humans were said to exist in a framework of universal orders, institutions, or ordinances operative prior to and independent of belief in Christ or membership in the church. These included the orders of nation, race, family, and vocation. God's law and commandments for all people were expressed through these, and, it was argued, they supplied stable reference points for the organization of human life and the configuration of ethical responsibility.⁶

Many of Barth's contemporaries, some of his closest colleagues, and even Barth himself, made use of this doctrine. Paul Althaus and Emanuel Hirsch, both well-known scholars of Luther and enthusiastic supporters of National Socialism,⁷ espoused a theology of the orders of creation

⁵ An appropriation usually attributed to Adolf von Harless that reached its zenith in the 1930s German neo-Lutheran theology, at which time many books and articles made use of it. See Deonna D. Neal, "Be Who You Are: Karl Barth's Ethics of Creation" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2010), 22; Carl E. Braaten, "God in public life: rehabilitating the 'orders of creation,'" *First Things* (December 1990): 32-3; Richard Higginson, "Bibliography: the two kingdoms and the orders of creation in 20th Century Lutheran Ethics," *Modern Churchman* 25, no.2, (1982), 40-3; Jonathon David Beeke, "Martin Luther's Two Kingdoms, Law and Gospel, and the Created Order: Was there a time when the two kingdoms were not?" *WTJ* 73 (2011) 191-214.

⁶ Neal, "Be Who You Are," 22-4; Jean-Loup Seban, "The Theology of Nationalism of Emanuel Hirsch," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 7, no.2 (1986), 157-76; Braaten, "God in public life," 32-3; Higginson, "Bibliography," 40-3.

⁷ Neither Hirsch nor Althaus joined the German Christian movement, although they were sympathetic to its concern for the Volk. They opposed the Confessing Church's response to the movement, and both were embraced by the

that had a nationalistic and antisemitic bent.⁸ They incorporated nation, state, and race into the classical Lutheran framework. They configured Volk as the primary *Ordnungen* and as such an indispensable form of human social life. The Volk was conceived as an organized unity and community, which shared a common blood, history, and destiny that was not reducible either to its biological or spiritual dimensions. The laws of the state were understood as the framework for the Volk's moral life and, as such, the law of God.⁹ Barth made constructive use of the orders of creation in a lecture series on ethics in the late 1920s,¹⁰ as did his theological allies, Friedrich

movement. Robert P. Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus and Emanuel Hirsch* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1985), 89; Seban, "Theology of Nationalism," 170.

⁸ Hirsch was on relatively friendly terms with Barth in the early 1920s while they were colleagues at Göttingen; but he, along with Paul Althaus, saw Barth and his dialectical colleagues as the central threats to theology as they envisioned it, and the two established a journal (*Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie*) in 1923 to rival the growing influence of *Zwischen den Zeiten*. He engaged in public negative exchanges with them, being openly critical of them through 1920s and 1930s, and announcing the end of Barth's relevance in 1940 (Seban, "Theology of Nationalism," 163-165). He saw behind the "German Turn" of 1933 the hand of God, and claimed that God had revealed himself as Father and Lord of history twice, first in Christ and second in the German nation. He wanted a Reich church that corresponded to the structure of the Reich, and he (along with Althaus) objected to the Confession of Barmen and deplored its anathematization of German Christians (ibid., 168-76).

⁹ Ibid., 157-70; Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler*, 100-2. Their theology, described in detail by Ericksen, "was implicitly conservative and law-oriented, suggesting that one is born into a station in life and should uncomplainingly recognize that as God's will" (ibid., 25). As described by Ericksen, Althaus's theology of the orders of creation equated God's will with the socio-political status quo, while recognizing that these orders are impacted negatively by a sinful and fallen world, and that they can only be understood properly in light of the revelation of God in Christ. In reference to the law of God as embodied in the orders, Althaus writes; "It binds each in the position to which he has been called by God and commits us to the natural orders under which we are subjugated, such as family, *Volk*, race (i.e. blood relationships)...In that the will of God also meets us continually in our here and now, it binds us also to a specific historical moment of family, *Volk* and race, i.e. to a specific moment of their history" (qtd. in Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler*, 100). Althaus's primary project was to incorporate a German experience or consciousness of the *Volk* (which he found expressed at its best in Herder, the Romantics and idealistic philosophers) into his theology as the primary law of God for the historical moment of the modern German era. A Volk was a divinely authorized combination of shared language, history, and spiritual inheritance (101-3). Ericksen notes that Althaus's antisemitic views were more reserved than the extreme positions of many of the theologians of the German Christian movement (many of whom devalued the Jewish law and Volk): for example, he accepted the Jewish contribution to Christianity, viewing the Old Testament Jews as a "chosen people" with a unique relationship to God. However, he accepted the Nazi policies of discrimination against the Jews (84, 104, 108.). Hirsch shared a similar view of and emphasis on the Volk. Hirsch also did not advocate some of the more extreme antisemitic views among the German Christians, but both he and Althaus were comfortable with the Aryan paragraph and sided with the German Christian movement and against the Confessing Church on this issue in 1933. Both he and Hirsch allowed that discrimination based on race could be added to the restrictions the church had always held against access to office, based on age, gender and physical ability (149-50, 108-9).

¹⁰ Barth makes positive use of orders of creation only in his 1928 Münster/1930 Bonn ethics lectures (§9 is devoted to a discussion of "Order" in a chapter titled "The Command of God the Creator"). He does not want it perceived as

Gogarten and Emil Brunner. His vocal objection to the doctrine during the 1930s and his public criticisms of its appropriation by Gogarten and Brunner are best understood in the context of the German Church crisis, which also precipitated the public unraveling of his relationship with his closest colleagues of the previous decade.

The years of 1933 and 1934 saw the National Socialists' rise to power on a tide of German nationalism and antisemitism. This resulted in a conflict between the German Christian and the Confessing Church movements, in which Barth played a very public role.¹¹ The nationalist theologies of Hirsch and Althaus had become widely popular. They buttressed the widespread rhetoric of Volk, nation, and blood and the configuration of Jews as the non-Aryan, foreign threat to an authentically German Christian faith and family. Efforts to de-canonize the Old Testament and reject a Pauline "rabbinic" concept of redemption have been well-documented.¹² The "Faith Movement of German Christians," a party that formed within the German Protestant Church in 1932 and gained influence in 1933, vocally supported the Volk-ideology of National Socialism. It published its guiding principles for the reorganization of the German Protestant Church in a document that declared "race, folk, and nation" God-given orders of creation, the preservation of which was God's law for the German people. Toward this end, it identified Jews as "alien blood" constituting a grave threat to German nationality, and it opposed

natural law. He turns against it when he sees its use by Gogarten, Brunner, and those who supported Nazi racial ideology. He refused to allow these lectures to be published during his lifetime (and this refusal has been attributed to his later embarrassment over his use of the orders of creation). John W. Hart, *Karl Barth vs. Emil Brunner: The Formation and Dissolution of a Theological Alliance, 1916-1936* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 117; Paul T. Nimmo, "The Orders of Creation in the theological ethics of Karl Barth," *SJT* 60, no.1 (2007): 24-35.

¹¹ Hitler was appointed Chancellor in January 1933, was granted emergency powers shortly thereafter, and quickly banished all other political parties, giving Nazis control of government and civil services. In August 1934, Hitler proclaimed himself Führer and imperial chancellor and Nazis had absolute political power (Hart, *Karl Barth vs. Emil Brunner*, 141-2).

¹² See especially Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 2008).

the granting of citizenship to Jews and interracial marriages between Jews and Germans.¹³ A counter movement, soon to be known as the Confessing Church, emerged in 1933 in response to the rising influence of the German Christians. The movement mobilized in opposition specifically to the threat to church autonomy perceived in the policies of the German Christian movement, and not to its Volk-ideology, although this would play a part in the movement's success. Barth was a widely-recognized leader in the movement, and he along with two Lutherans drafted its famous Barmen declaration for the Synod that gathered in May of 1934, which declared the theology of the German Christians a heresy and its resisters the true and legal German Protestant Church.

Many members of the Confessing Church shared the nationalism and antisemitism of the German Christians. The Confessing Church's primary concern was with the threat to ecclesial autonomy they perceived in the German Christians' call for a Reich Church and the assimilation of the Protestant Church into the National Socialist state. Hitler's positive response to this assimilation, capped by his appointment of German Christian leader Ludwig Müller as deputy and adviser in church affairs, galvanized the Confessing Church's rejection of a Protestant Reich Church.¹⁴ However, tensions between the Confessing Church and the German Christian movement came to a head in the latter's concerted efforts to pass racist legislation for the purpose of purifying a *völkisch* church from "foreign" influence. Many within the German

¹³ Shelley Baranowski, "Confessing Church and Antisemitism: Protestant Identity, German Nationhood, and the Exclusion of the Jews," in *Betrayal: German churches and the Holocaust*, ed. Robert P. Ericksen and Susannah Heschel (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1999), 90-109; Hart, *Karl Barth vs. Emil Brunner*, 142-3. The seventh principle of the "Guiding Principles of the Faith Movement of the 'German Christians'" states: "We see in race, folk, and nation, orders of existence granted and entrusted to us by God. God's law for us is that we look to the preservation of these orders" (qtd. in *ibid.*, 142). The ninth principle states: "In the mission to the Jews we perceive a grave danger to our nationality. It is an entrance gate for alien blood into our body politic...As long as Jews possess the right of citizenship and there is thereby the danger of racial camouflage and bastardization, we repudiate a mission to the Jews in Germany. Holy Scripture is also able to speak about a holy wrath and a refusal of love. In particular, marriage between Germans and Jews is to be forbidden" (qtd. in *ibid.*, 142).

¹⁴ See especially Baranowski, "Confessing Church," 90-110.

Christian movement wanted to impose the Aryan Paragraph, a regulation that would have dismissed and barred from clergy and church office any German not of Aryan descent (that is, any whose parents or grandparents were Jewish or who were married to Jews). In supporting this measure, many German Christians sought to imitate the state's exclusion of non-Aryans from civil service positions as legislated in 1933. This was a divisive measure even within the German Christian movement, and efforts to pass the legislation (to put it into the constitution of the German Christian movement) failed in July and September of 1933. The Aryan Paragraph became a rallying point around which the Confessing Church was able to successfully mobilize public opposition to the more extreme efforts of the German Christians to remove all Jewish influence from the Church (i.e. de-canonizing the Old Testament, removing "Jewish" elements of the New Testament, and recasting Jesus as Aryan).¹⁵

Debate over this legislation hinged on the efficacy of baptism and its relationship to racial and sexual differences. Arguments for the exclusion of Jews from church office relied on the distinction between the universal, invisible church and the visible church. In the visible church, it was argued, such distinctions as race and sexual difference remained intact, grounded in divine ordinances established in creation. Those in support of the legislation privileged race over sacramental efficacy, arguing that race determined one's place within any specific national church. Converted Jews belonged in separate congregations, and an authentic church for the German people should be based on blood and not baptism.¹⁶ Since women could not be ordained, arguments in support of the Aryan paragraph often drew an analogy between I

¹⁵ Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 88-93. See Heschel, *Aryan Jesus* for an exploration of scholarly efforts within the German Christian movement and university faculty to remove Jewish influence from theology, liturgy and Scripture.

¹⁶ Baranowski, "Confessing Church," 101-2; Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 69, 86; Hart, *Karl Barth vs. Emil Brunner*, 145-6.

Corinthians 14:34 (instructing women to keep silent in the churches) and contemporary efforts to exclude non-Aryans from pastoral office. It was argued that baptism no more eradicated sexual difference than it did racial difference, and that Galatians 3.28 (“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” [RSV]) referred to the universal, spiritual church but not to the visible church.¹⁷

Debate over the Aryan Paragraph took center-stage at the national level in 1934. The Confessing Church’s success in rallying public opposition to the Aryan Paragraph and also to other extreme measures contributed to the declining influence of the German Christian movement in 1934. In 1935, the National Socialists withdrew their patronage of the movement, viewing the movement as a political liability due to the popular outrage they had evoked. The German Christian movement retained considerable influence, however, especially in the theological faculties, and efforts to put the Aryan Paragraph into practice continued at the regional level. In many parts of the country, policies required candidates for office in the church to provide proof of Aryan ancestry, but the immense amount of paperwork this entailed prevented such policies from being widely enforced.¹⁸

Barth was a well-known public figure within the Confessing Church, but being from Switzerland he was already viewed as somewhat of an outsider. Due to his public opposition to fascist nationalism, Volk theology, and antisemitic policies, he was considered one of the Confessing Church’s more radical members. While the Confessing Church made the question of the Aryan Paragraph a focal point for rallying support against the German Christian movement,

¹⁷ Bergen, *Twisted Cross* 68-9; Frank Jehle, *Ever Against the Stream: The Politics of Karl Barth, 1906-1968* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2012)49.

¹⁸ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 88-93; Baranowski, “Confessing Church,” 101-2. See Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, on the continuing influence and efforts of faculty of the German Christian movement.

many of its members shared with their opponents an appreciation for nationalist *völkisch* theology and its inherent antisemitism. Jews and Judaism were viewed by many as degenerate moral and spiritual influences on the German churches.¹⁹ One prominent example was Martin Niemöller, the leader of the Confessing Church. While Niemöller organized opposition to the Aryan Paragraph, he nevertheless considered the presence of Jews in the church to be a hurdle for its German constituents, and he proposed that officeholders of Jewish ancestry spare their fellow Christians by declining prominent positions in the church.²⁰ While in the beginning of the movement Barth was embraced and his Barmen Declaration unanimously accepted, he was known to be outspoken against any compromising positions over antisemitic policies, and many thought him not diplomatic enough on this point. One instance was his criticism of one of his closer colleagues, Georg Merz, for accepting political forms of antisemitism as a matter of national self-interest while opposing ecclesial forms on the basis of the priesthood of all believers. Like Niemöller, Merz suggested Jewish Christians exercise restraint in seeking office.²¹

Barth's letters and public statements have been mined in recent scholarship for expressions of his opposition to ecclesial and political forms of antisemitism. Collectively, they show him ready to express horror at the ill treatment of the Jews, to speak of haters of Jews as haters of Christ, to speak of the antisemitic policies of National Socialism as the boundary beyond which a believer in Christ must not transgress, and to oppose the alienation of Jews

¹⁹ Jehle, *Against the Stream*, 50. Many arguments of the Confessing Church members targeted the more extreme efforts of German Christians to eradicate Jewish influence from the Church by recasting the Old Testament prophets and Jesus as anti-Jewish in their condemnation of Israel (Heschel, *Aryan Jesus*, 5).

²⁰ Baranowski, "Confessing Church," 102.

²¹ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 90; Jehle, *Against the Stream*, 46-55, 143-9.

within the German churches as an abandonment of the Gospel of Christ.²² In his 1933 pamphlet, “Theological Existence Today!” (a copy of which he sent to Hitler personally that summer), he objected to German Christian efforts at making blood and race, rather than baptism, the criterion for membership in the church. In a public statement of the same year, he criticized the church’s silence over the Nazi’s seizure of power, confiscation of properties, concentration camps, and mistreatment of the Jews. This statement was cited repeatedly in the trial preceding his expulsion from Germany. He was forced to leave Germany in 1935.²³

In Switzerland, Barth continued his public opposition to National Socialism and its antisemitic policies. There he was appointed Commissioner for Refugees by the Basel government, and he was involved in his secretary Charlotte von Kirschbaum’s efforts to assist Jewish and Jewish-Christian refugees.²⁴ He played a role in disseminating a report from an escaped Auschwitz prisoner that helped inform Allies of the plight of the Hungarian Jews, and he

²² See Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, “Theological And Political Motivations of Karl Barth in the Church Struggle (1973),” in *Theological Audacities: Selected Essays*, ed. Andreas Pangritz and Paul S. Chung (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 190-222; Eberhard Busch, *Unter dem Bogen des einen Bundes: Karl Barth und die Juden 1933-1945* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1996); Jehle, *Against the Stream*, 46-60; Mark R. Lindsay, *Barth, Israel, and Jesus: Karl Barth’s Theology of Israel* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 15-35. Jehle and Lindsay have gathered different statements from private correspondence, discussions, and public speeches in which Barth expresses outrage at the treatment of the Jews. I will note some of the most notable instances. On September 1, 1933 he wrote that the position of National Socialism regarding Jews demarcated the boundary beyond which any who adhere to the Gospel must never cross (Jehle, *Against the Stream*, 52). In 1933 he publicly opposed the Church’s silence over the summer’s Nazi seizure of power, confiscation of properties, concentration camps, and mistreatment of the Jews (ibid., 52). His 1933 pamphlet, *Theologische Existenz heute!* spoke in defense of Jewish Christians who were being forced out of congregations by the imposition of racist legislation. Critics fault him for restricting his criticism in this pamphlet to ecclesial policies against the Jews. It seems this reticence was deliberate; as Lindsay notes, in an earlier draft Barth (as he explained in a letter to Eduard Thurneysen) had been more politically critical but had been encouraged by friends to soften the tone (*Barth, Israel, and Jesus*, 22-3). In January 1934 he wrote in a letter that no believer in the Jewish Christ could be involved in the ill treatment and contempt for the Jews then so current (ibid., 22). In February 1934 in private correspondence he expressed his horror and shame over what was being done to the Jewish people in Germany, saying that the divine Word must be heard in a new way with regard to this situation. He identified antisemitism with paganism (Jehle, *Against the Stream*, 52; see also Hart, *Karl Barth vs. Emil Brunner*, 143-49).

²³ Jehle, *Against the Stream*, 47-53; Lindsay, *Barth, Israel, and Jesus*, 22-3.

²⁴ It was von Kirschbaum who oversaw these resistance activities and efforts to help Jewish refugees, although Jehle foregrounds Barth’s involvement as the one who authorized her efforts, as part of Jehle’s efforts to defend Barth against criticisms that he did not do enough to oppose antisemitic policies of the Nazis (*Against the Stream*, 31).

was involved in efforts (ultimately unsuccessful) to halt the mass deportation of Hungarian Jews in 1944.²⁵ He publicly criticized National Socialism's ideology and policies, supported military aggression against Hitler, and reflected on the benefits of an armed insurrection in Germany—all positions that troubled many of his former allies in the Confessing Church.²⁶ He was especially critical of the antisemitism of Nazi policies, which he declared to be the very heart of National Socialism. He decried its antisemitism as anti-Christian and explicitly referenced and decried the systematic extermination of the Jews and the weak.²⁷ While many in Switzerland were sympathetic to his position, he was viewed as a diplomatic danger to Swiss neutrality, and eventually Barth was banned from speaking politically in Switzerland, and his phone was tapped.²⁸

Barth's public and private opposition to antisemitism and National Socialism have been well-documented and have been both praised for their prophetic character and criticized for their inadequacy. Critics observe that his public opposition to antisemitism was markedly restrained in comparison to his criticisms on other contemporary issues.²⁹ My concern here is not to defend

²⁵ Ibid., 33-4.

²⁶ Ibid., 60.

²⁷ In a conference on December 5, 1938 (in response to Kristallnacht) he gave a lecture referring to the consequences of the German persecution of Jews; he identified the life-breath of National socialism with its antisemitism which he called anti-Christian and anti-Christ, and he made explicit reference to the "physical extermination" of the people of Israel, the burning of synagogues and Torah-scrolls; he called this a rejection of the God of the Jews and of the Bible of the Jews. He declared that such enemies of the Jews are enemies of Christ, such a sin against the Jews is a sin against the Holy Spirit (ibid., 60; Lindsay, *Barth, Israel, and Jesus*, 31-3).

²⁸ These measures were taken primarily because of anger in the Berlin regime over two of his lectures, which were directed against the German regime and indicated his awareness of the extermination of the Jews and the weak and their assaults on all who resisted their regime (Jehle, *Against the Stream*, 70).

²⁹ Barth's position toward the Jews and his doctrine of Israel continues to be a topic of discussion and debate, the terms of which are summarized nicely by Katherine Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ was born a Jew: Karl Barth's 'Doctrine of Israel'* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992, and by Mark Lindsay, *Barth, Israel, and Jesus* (esp. ch. 2). While space does not permit a survey of Barth's theological understanding of Judaism and Israel, some of the criticisms raised regarding Barth's construal of Israel will have implications for my later analysis of Barth's account of gender. Most notable for my project is a question raised by Barth's student, Friedrich Marquardt, and addressed in Sonderegger's study: the question of whether Barth's depiction of Jews and his

him against these criticisms, but rather to note the public, critical stance that he took in order to make explicit the contemporary valence of the, perhaps too subtle, subversive elements in his reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan and in his construal of the neighbor as a sacramental event that undermines ethnic and religious boundaries. Before turning to §18, however, I want to draw attention to the specific criticisms he directed at the orders of creation framework, and in particular his public debate with Emil Brunner, which took place in 1934, at

doctrine of Israel is precisely the sort of abstraction his theology seeks to avoid, one that conceals the concrete lives of actual Jews by construing them as a mirror that reflects the will of another. Eugene F. Rogers links this problem in Barth's doctrine of Israel to his account of gender (see *Sexuality and the Christian Body*). This is a criticism I will return to at the end of this chapter, by which time, I will have presented Barth's conceptualization of the other as a mirror that reflects the self and the humanity of Christ, apart from and in spite of the other's own agency and self-understanding. One of my concerns will be to highlight both the problematic and critical potential in this construal of the other. Sonderegger and Lindsay both provide surveys of the criticisms directed against Barth's response to the antisemitism of the 1930s and against his doctrine of Israel. For some, his christocentrism alone entrenches his theology in the antisemitic heritage of Christianity (Wolfgang Gerlach, R. Kendall Soulen, Katherine Sonderegger, Daniel Johan Goldhagen). Others (Robert Ericksen, Richard Gutteridge) attribute to him a neutral position that became passive in political and ethical crises and led to a willful neglect of Nazi antisemitic policies. The latter critique (in its more extreme form) has been refuted by Lindsay's study, among others. A smaller group locates within his theology (though not in any feelings of empathy of his own) resources that motivated his pro-Jewish political stance (for this typography see Lindsay, *Barth, Israel, and Jesus*, 16, 23-5). Lindsay attempts to defend Barth against criticism coming from both sympathetic and unsympathetic readers—those who accuse Barth's theology of producing an abstract picture of Jews based on no real knowledge of or relationship with Jewish individuals and who fault him for not taking a more vocal public stance against the antisemitism of National Socialism. Lindsay has in view Sonderegger, Marquardt, George Casalis, John Bowden, and Michael Wyschogrod (23-5). Lindsay notes that most critics take at face value and use in support of these claims two letters written by Barth later in his life: in one he regrets not making his opposition to antisemitism a more decisive issue and admits his interests were focused elsewhere (a letter to Eberhard Bethge in 1967); in another, frequently cited, letter to Marquardt in September 1967 he admits to a "reprehensible" and "a totally irrational aversion," an "allergic reaction" in his personal interactions with Jews, that he finds "reprehensible" (qtd. in *ibid.*, 23). Lindsay notes that this admission gets read back into his theology [following Barth's own suspicion that it influenced his doctrine]. To counter the claim that Barth had no substantial engagement with real Jewish people or with Judaism, Lindsay presents evidence of Barth's involvement with individual Jews, the influence of certain Jewish intellectuals on him, and Lindsay notes his outspoken political stance and activities. He argues that Barth was not as blind to contemporary Jewish scholarship, or as alienated from individual Jews, as he has often been portrayed, and he notes his vocal opposition to Hitler's genocidal program in ecclesial and political arenas (see *ibid.*, 21-30). Lindsay's evidence sheds helpful light on the extent to which Barth did relate to Jews and was politically active in opposition to antisemitic policies, and for my purposes, it gives good reason to see a subversive undercurrent to Barth's construal of the neighbor in §18. However, in itself, this activity and interaction does little to unsettle the criticism that Barth presents an abstract doctrine of Israel. More generally speaking, Eugene Rogers notes that Barth did make important innovations for his time (though they look retrograde now) in his theological accounts of Israel and of men and women: "After Barth," Rogers writes, "the Jews could no longer be other than the people of God, and women could no longer be deficient men. As a matter of christological exegesis, Israel becomes again the chosen people of God, beside whom Gentiles retain their goyishness, and women become *constitutive* of the image of God, integral to a *co-humanity* consummated in the neighbor-love of Jesus" (Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body*, 147). See Gary Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology: Theology without Weapons* (Louisville: Westminster, 2000), 131-45 for a brief account of related post-war criticisms of Barth's relation to politics, advanced by Brunner, Buttmann and Tillich.

the height of the controversy over the Aryan Paragraph. Here we see his efforts to completely separate himself from the natural theology advanced by a theologian who many viewed as similar to Barth.

During the developing crisis of the German churches in the early 1930s, Barth publicly distanced himself from his closest theological allies of the past decade. In a number of publications, he identified in the theologies of Brunner, Gogarten, and Bultmann the use of criteria and sources other than the Word of God as witnessed to in Scripture, and so he faulted them for making recourse to a natural theology. One point of criticism was the use Brunner and Gogarten made of the orders of creation in their ethical works, which Barth considered too close for comfort to the theologies appreciated by the German Christians (the theologies of Hirsch and Althaus being the most prominent examples). Both colleagues sought alternatives and correctives to the Volk theologies being used by the German Christians. In such institutions as marriage, family, and state, they found expressions of the concrete, divinely instituted arrangements through which God's will for human social life could be discerned. In his *Political Ethics* (1932) Gogarten privileged the state above the other orders, arguing that the law of God for the German people was to be found in the concrete specificity of the law of the Volk. He briefly joined the German Christian movement in 1933 and criticized Barth and the Confessing Church for opposing the Nazi state, although he soon broke from the German Christians over their antisemitic policies.³⁰ While Brunner did not himself join the German Christians his *Divine Imperative* (1932) was well-received by them, a strike against it in Barth's view. Brunner's ethical framework, influenced by Barth in many ways, elevated monogamous marriage to a

³⁰ James C. Livingston, et al., "The Theologies of Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer," in *Modern Christian Theology*, vol II, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2000), 101-3; Neal, "Be Who You Are," 27-42; Hart, *Karl Barth vs. Emil Brunner*, 146-8.

higher dignity than the rest, as an ordinance that predated the Fall. All ordinances, as discernible constants in the socio-historical life of humanity, were to be understood as provisional measures, divinely instituted to limit the effects of sin. Brunner described them as imprints of God's activity within human social life, objectively given—in an analogous sense to the biblical text. Through reason and instinct their necessity and dignity were widely recognized; however, only by way of a revelation mediated through Christ could their inherent good be fully appreciated and practiced.³¹ Barth's efforts to publicly distance himself from his colleagues came to a head in a heated exchange with Brunner in 1934. Brunner published a treatise titled "Nature and Grace," in which he defended his use of natural theology against Barth's criticisms and argued that he shared Barth's central theological commitments. Barth's published response, "No!," objected in no uncertain terms to any affinity between his own theology and Brunner's on the issue of natural theology.³²

³¹ Emil Brunner, "Nature and Grace," in *Natural Theology*, 25-50; Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1936). In "Nature and Grace" Brunner distinguishes an objective side (imprints of God's activity in human social life that are there whether recognized as such or not), and a subjective side (the human capacity to recognize them as such). He argues that we have a limited capacity to recognize their import and dignity but that this capacity is distorted by sin and requires a revelation mediated through Christ. Notably he draws an analogy here to the objective and subjective character of God's self-revelation through Scripture, arguing that if Barth agrees to the latter he must agree to the former (49-50). See Hart for a detailed account of the relationship, interaction and correspondence between the two during this year (*Karl Barth vs. Emil Brunner*, 150-64).

³² Hart's book-length study of the relationship between Brunner and Barth (*Karl Barth vs. Emil Brunner*) relativizes the significance widely attached to the 1934 debate for understanding the dissolution in the relationship between the two men. He argues that the "natural theology debate," as it is often called, gives the wrong impression that it was a careful exegesis or dogmatic discussion of natural theology, and that it was the locale and occasion for the breakdown in their relationship. Rather it was the culmination of disagreements between the two developing since 1929, with roots dating back to 1924, and connected to a number of issues, among them: the nature of dialectic and revelation; the relationship between theology and philosophy; the location of anthropology within theology; the task of theology. The 1934 exchange merely stated clearly what had been on their minds for the past five years. This debate is important for my purposes in that it expresses their differences concisely and presents the sort of model for thinking about orders of creation that Barth has in view in §18.

There are several key points to Barth's criticisms of his colleagues' appeal to the orders of creation, expressed in his public exchange with Brunner and in previous publications.³³ First, and most importantly for Barth's enduring assault on natural theology, he argues that to find God's ethical mandates for human life in socio-historical constants that are in any sense perceivable apart from Scripture's witness to God's revelation, is to allow for a human capacity to know God's will and to act in accord with it.³⁴ Second, he argues that to identify constant patterns of social life and to elevate them to the status of binding and authoritative divine commands is to universalize a private *Weltanschauung*.³⁵ Third, and most pertinent to my subsequent analysis, he argues that to locate the law of God within a sphere of life that is separable from the revelation of God in Christ is to separate the sphere of divine law from the sphere of gospel, thus providing the grounds for an ethics of self-justification in which an individual must in some sense cooperate in his or her own salvation.³⁶

In §18, the reasons Barth gives for his rejection of an orders of creation approach to ethics reiterates and builds upon concerns and objections cited in these earlier publications, but

³³ In the following Barth criticizes his colleagues' use of natural theology or makes critical references to the orders of creation: *The First Commandment as an Axiom of Theology* (May 10, 1933); *Theological Existence Today!* (June 24, 1933); "Barmen Declaration" (May, 1934); *Nein!* (1934); "Gospel and Law" (Oct, 1935); 'Das Halten Der Gebote,' in *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1925-1930*, ed. Hermann Schmidt, 99-139. The latter was a public lecture that locates the relationship between law and gospel at the center of what Barth objects to in the orders of creation framework. For an account of Barth's developing opposition to the orders of creation in these works see Neal, "Be Who You Are," 27-42.

³⁴ See especially *The First Commandment* (in *The Way of Theology in Karl Barth: Essays and Comments*, ed. H. Martin Rumscheidt, [Allison Park, PA: Wipf and Stock, 1986], 69-76): Here Barth reads in the first commandment the response to a hearing of a divine command delivered by one God, emerging from the multiplicity of gods, selecting particular hearers, and imposing himself as their exclusive God, against which all other gods must fade away. In the face of this command all other "axioms" are idols. And this is Barth's assessment of orders of creation, insofar as they are treated, like axioms, as immediately and generally perceivable, timelessly evident, and awaiting human discovery and evaluation.

³⁵ "No!," in *Natural Theology*, 86-7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 90. In Barth's estimation, this Lutheran separation of the sphere of the gospel from that of creation and law enabled the German Christian and National Socialist policies he objected to (see Jonathon David Beeke, "Martin Luther's Two Kingdoms," *WTJ* 73 [2011] 191-214, esp. 192, and fn. 9).

they are tailored to support his description of an “order of praise” that hinges on a dialectic of grace and law proper to his account of Christian ethics.

THE ORDERS OF PRAISE

Within *Church Dogmatics*, §18 represents Barth’s first extended discussion of ethics, and the central questions it addresses are the identity of the “neighbor” for whom the Christian is responsible and the nature of that obligation. Given its location within the broader context of Barth’s theological prolegomenon, §18 unsurprisingly foregrounds the ethical responsibility of theological activity itself, as it is enacted within the community of the Church. This focus was especially germane to the debates in which Barth was immersed at that time, where the primary voices were those of theologians, biblical scholars, and clergy. As we shall soon see, Barth draws the sphere of Christian ethical obligation very broadly, broad enough to include ethnic and religious “outsiders” of the visible Church within its ambit.

In §18, Barth makes explicit what has been implicit all along in the first volume of *Church Dogmatics*: in the very doing of theology we are already in the arena of theological ethics where there is no clear-cut distinction between ethical obligation and theological activity. Indeed throughout *Church Dogmatics* I, Barth’s understanding of the ethical character of theology (or the theological character of ethics) is evident in his description of the method, orientation, and character of a theological practice that seeks and hopes to be responsive to divine self-disclosure. When God reveals Godself through the media of Christian discourse, that gracious communication (of knowledge) enables a hearing of the divine self-revealing Word and simultaneously imposes a command on the hearer, both to hear and to speak rightly of the Word.

Thus when theological activity is a response to a hearing of the Word in human words, it is either an obedient or disobedient activity. It is in this respect an ethical activity that seeks to respond properly to a preceding divine act (but one that is, as we shall see, not readily accessible to the human actor). The gratuity of the gospel thus precedes the duty imposed by the law in Barth's dialectical account of the event in which one becomes hearer of the Word, for a divine act of grace must enable the hearing and in so doing enable the obedient response.

Throughout his first volume Barth continually reminds the reader of the theologian's complete dependence on and necessary orientation toward the voice of the divine Other heard within Christian discourse (biblical and theological texts and ecclesial proclamation). Barth attempts both to describe and enact a theological practice that aspires to be obedient to this divine voice. The focus in §18 now turns to the theologian's dependence on and responsibility for the human other, whom he conceptualizes as a material reference point of the theologian's relationship to the divine Other. He depicts the relationship to the human other as the "outer sign" of the "inner reality" of this relationship to God. In the process, Barth delineates the sphere of human others for whom the theological practitioner is responsible. As will be seen shortly, the concrete, visible, temporal, boundaries dividing religions and races are rendered permeable, while the Word-incarnate remains the agential center and force through which mundane fellow human beings become media ("secular forms" as Barth often calls such media) for a fresh hearing of the Word. It is the mediation of the divine address through the human other that serves to unsettle and destabilize the boundaries of the visible church. As I will argue, one effect of this destabilization will be to undermine contemporary attempts to exclude any group of persons from the province of Christian fellowship and the sphere of its ethical obligation.

In delineating this ethical sphere, Barth gains his bearings from his exegesis of the parable of the Good Samaritan and its connection to the two great commandments of Christ: the love of God and the love of neighbor. Barth briefly signals his refusal to orient his discussion in terms of the “ordinances” or “orders” (*Ordnungen*) of creation, which he includes among several frameworks (*Rahmen*) for conceptualizing moral obligation that he will *not* entertain (404-6). While for many of his contemporaries the orders of creation were the obvious place to begin a discussion of ethical obligation, Barth refuses to locate the “neighbor” whom the Christian is commanded to love within a framework understood as: “all those real and historically visible orders, marriage, the family, calling, nationality, the state, in which we all undoubtedly exist and in which we no less definitely have to recognize and respect the ordinances of creation and therefore the ordinances of God” (404/445).³⁷ His reasons build on concerns and objections cited in his earlier publications, but they are here tailored to support his description of an “order of praise” and an “order of humility” that hinges on a dialectic of gospel and law proper to Barth’s ethical framework. Bypassing any reference to contemporary proponents of an orders of creation ethic, Barth goes directly to Luther, their authorizing source:

we shall have to treat with some reserve the advice frequently given by Luther, that we must seek our neighbour within the orders of life and society [*“der Lebens- und Gemeinschaftsordnungen”* in which we actually find ourselves: the husband in his wife, the children in their parents and brothers and sisters, the master in the servant, the inferior in the superior and vice versa, the national in the fellow-national and so on. (416/459)]³⁸

³⁷ “d . h . auf die in der Geschichte wirklichen und erkennbaren Ordnungen der Ehe, der Familie, des Berufs, des Volkstums, des Staates, in denen wir alle fraglos existieren und in denen wir mit ebenso fragloser Bestimmtheit die Ordnungen der Schöpfung und also die Ordnungen Gottes zu erkennen und zu respektieren hätten” [*KD*, 445]. Barth and his contemporaries designated these orders in a variety of ways and some distinguished between orders of creation and orders of preservation; for simplicity I will simply call them “orders of creation” (*die Schöpfungsordnungen*).

³⁸ Barth does not here mention or dialogue with those contemporaries that use the rejected framework. The orders of creation approach to ethics is presented and dismissed by Barth as if it were only a marginal issue, but one of many wrong approaches. He does not dignify it with sustained attention. This is all part of the performance for in Barth’s

Barth gives two primary reasons for this rejection. First, in trying to locate the neighbor whom we are commanded to love in such orders of human society, we do not move beyond anthropology but arrive only at “the knowledge of a God who is made in our own image, the content and idea of our own freedom and our own relationships” (405). Second, (and he finds Luther suspect on this point), such efforts to locate the neighbor in these orders of society might “easily lead to the idea that the neighbour is one to whom we have a definite duty, who has a claim upon us” (416). This approach risks viewing the neighbor first and foremost as the embodiment of the law, and, as such, “a Law separated and emptied of the Gospel” (416). When the neighbor is sought as the embodiment of a duty or obligation, the seeker continues on a course of self-justification, hoping to earn the love of God by fulfilling this duty to neighbor. To be oriented toward these orders of society is, therefore, to be oriented improperly. In Barth’s view, when our efforts are exclusively our own we are unavoidably oriented wrongly (whether in acts of self-love or self-justification).³⁹ Thus Barth suspects that existing social relationships

understanding, to reject a problematic approach (a false source for theological reflection) is to refuse to give it sustained attention.

³⁹ It is helpful to note the broader framework of rejected options in which this refusal of the orders of creation is couched, since we see resonances with themes in Barth’s prolegomenon. Here Barth incorporates the orders of creation into his sustained criticisms of a natural theology that can never become more than anthropology. Barth is discussing different problematic ways of construing the relationship between the two commandments. One of these approaches identifies the two commands (to love the neighbor whom we can readily see and know is to love the God whom we cannot readily see and know). And there are two ways in which this identification is made, but Barth accuses both identifications of the same vice: they confuse the love of God and of the neighbor with the love of self, an identification that allows for no encounter with a genuine other. The one approach Barth calls a “realist” or “historical” perspective on the phenomenal, visible sphere of the existing orders of creation (found in organizations of social life), and the other he terms an “idealist” or “humanitarian” approach, which entails projecting what we find worthy and admirable in our love of neighbor onto our love of God, and making that projection normative. The critique of the latter is a familiar one by this point in the prolegomenon, and Barth now extends it to an orders of creation approach: “We have to put the same question to both the humanitarian and the historical schools: whether the so-called humanity or the so-called ordinances are given and known by us in the sphere of the created world in such a way that in them we can recognise the divine creation? whether in this sphere of sin and reconciliation there can be any direct knowledge of God and His commandments, i.e., a knowledge which is based directly upon creation apart from revelation?” (*Church Dogmatics* I/2, 404-5). The answer for Barth is “No.” He concludes, “the idealism of the humanitarians and the realism of the historicists both lead us to the same empty cistern: to the

provide no escape from the human loveless and isolated pursuit of self-reflection, self-discovery, and self-justification; instead they often serve to instantiate it (404-5). Thus he claims: “The freedom of the children of God begins only where the freedom, which we think we experience in our humanity, ends. Their real relationship begins only where the relationship with what they think they experience and know as ordinances [*Ordnungen*] in history ends” (405/447).

Objecting to a Lutheran framework that separates law and duty from gospel and grace, Barth subtly transposes the entire discussion of ethical obligation into a Reformed framework that emphasizes the role of divine agency in the efficacious communication of grace through mundane creaturely media.⁴⁰ Having refused to reflect on the significance of patterns and institutions in existing social structures, Barth turns to the biblical text to learn how to identify his neighbor, and thus to what he has all along approached as a discursive sphere of signs and media that direct the gaze to Christ. The two commandments (as presented in Mt. 22.37ff; Mk. 12.29ff; Lk. 10.27ff) provide his biblical template for addressing the question of how a life in conformity with the actuality of God’s revelation in Christ ought to be lived (367).⁴¹ We cannot,

knowledge of a God who is made in our own image, the content and idea of our own freedom and our own relationships” (405).

⁴⁰ For a discussion of Barth’s theological immersion in Reformed theology that began in the early 1920s as he prepared for his first faculty position at Göttingen see Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology* (New York: Oxford U.P. 1995), 332; John A. Vissers, “Karl Barth’s appreciative use of Herman Bavinck’s Reformed Dogmatics,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45, no.1 (April 2010): 79-86; Cornelis van der Kooi, “Herman Bavinck and Karl Barth on Christian Faith and Culture,” *Calvin Theological Journal* (April 2010), 72-9; Kooi, “The concept of culture in Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, and Karl Barth,” in *Crossroad Discourses between Christianity and Culture*, ed. Jerald D. Gort, et al. (New York: Rodopi, 2010), 37-51; Paul T. Nimmo, “Bavinck, Barth, and the Uniqueness of the Eucharist,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 29.1 (Spring 2011), 108-26. See John Webster, *Barth’s Earlier Theology: Four Studies* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005) for a detailed discussion of Barth’s earliest engagement with the Reformation theologies of the Lord’s Supper. Webster notes that during the early 1920s Barth developed lasting patterns for interpreting the relationship between the theologies of Luther, Zwingli and Calvin and the traditions they evoked, as he developed a growing mistrust of Lutheran theology over fifteen years in German Universities among Lutheran colleagues, and an increasing appreciation for Calvin (15-39).

⁴¹ Barth reminds the reader that the Christian life cannot be presented in a fixed way, as if it could be “photographed psychologically.” He cannot present an abstract portrait of what the sanctified Christian looks like, because we are

Barth argues, know of or enact this love of God and neighbor without first being redirected out of our self-love and self-justification by an act of divine love, an act that must necessarily precede and enable our love in return, an act that is mediated through our fellow neighbor. He thus construes the two commandments as two sides of the human response invoked by a preceding divine act: the love of God is the inner and hidden reality of which the love of neighbor is the outer sign and external manifestation (368-71). He discusses first the inner reality and then the outer sign.⁴² At each level my focus will be on the orientation of the relationship of self to divine and human others, and the dialectic of gospel and law embedded in it.

THE INNER REALITY: THE LOVE OF GOD

Barth develops his account of what the love of God entails for Christians in general and for theological practitioners in particular from a lengthy analysis of the first commandment as it is presented in Mark 12.29-31: "Hear O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all they heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength."⁴³ The human activity commanded here, he argues, can only be accomplished as the

always addressed by revelation as we are, in a state of conflict, between the sinful reality that we remain and the divine address that judges and reconciles us—an address we have to hear again and again (363).

⁴² The "inner reality" is "the hidden reality" of one's own existence. Here Barth has in mind human existence and self-determination as it is directed and guided by the divine reality: "the being and inward aspect of man, as claimed in revelation." It will be described as the self's divinely enabled and evoked seeking of and love for God. By outward sign, Barth has in view the self's relationship to other human beings, in the particular form of a divinely enabled and evoked confessional or professional activity that gives public witness to this love for God (368-71). The neighbor is the material medium through which God acts and the material reference point toward which the human responds. In this sense, Barth writes: "my neighbour acquires for me a sacramental significance....he becomes and is a visible sign of invisible grace, a proof that I, too, am not left alone in this world, but am borne and directed by God" (436).

⁴³ Since Barth considers the two commandments to be inseparable (the outer sign of an inner reality) he quotes the two together here, although his focus is on the first in this section: "Hear O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all they heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy

response to a preceding and enabling divine act of love (380). This divine act confronts the human subject with the “objective” (*gegenständlich*) divine other, interrupting and reorienting the subject out of self-love in a returning movement to its loving benefactor (386/425):

The decisive element which is revealed in this fact is that love is love for another. Of course, this element is real only in love to God, and in the love to the neighbour which it includes and posits. All other loving is compromised as such by the uncertainty of the objectivity or otherness of the one who is loved, by the possibility that the one who supposedly loves is perhaps really alone. Where there is no otherness of the one who is loved, where the one who loves is alone, he does not really love. (386-7)

The divine act of love that Barth has in view here is the revelatory Word (Christ as God incarnate) mediated to the subject through the creaturely media of biblical discourse, but Barth does not discuss the specific medium he currently has in view (i.e. the biblical depiction of the neighbor) until turning to discuss the second commandment. For now, he continues his prolegomenon-long project of humbling and castigating an autonomous, overly confident, self-loving and self-absorbed human subject, while at the same time reminding this subject of the hope that demands a ceaseless search for a fresh hearing of the Word in human words. Playing on the “order” language of the framework that he has rejected, Barth depicts this loving search for God as the submission to a divinely imposed “order of praise” (*Ordnung des Lobes*) (424/468), “order of grace” (*Ordnung der Gnade*) (409/451), and “order of humiliation” (*Ordnung der Demütigung*) (394/433). As we shall see, the order operative in Barth’s account is constituted by the gracious gift or imposition of the divine subject through a creaturely medium, and as such it simultaneously humbles the subject and reorients him or her in a hopeful pursuit of the divine subject revealed and concealed in creaturely forms.⁴⁴

strength. And the second is this: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (qtd. in 381). The entire analysis of the first commandment is from pages 381-401.

⁴⁴ “The order which obtains here and which right to the very core of our being is always and unreservedly an order of humiliation” (*eine Ordnung der Demütigung*) (394/433).

The divine act of love is the Word meeting the subject in the creaturely guise of a “mirror.” It reflects and communicates an unpleasant and unsettling truth about the self: a truth that self-reflection will not disclose, neither will the socio-historical orders of creation; a truth that must be heard from and through an “other”; a truth that both humbles and reorients the self out of its circular relation with itself, and bars any direct return to the self:

If love, as distinct from the illusion of self-love, is love for another, and if this other is God the Lord, then our loving must be defined as the nature and attitude of man, conscious that he is of a different kind from that object. Love to God takes place in the self-knowledge of repentance in which we learn about ourselves by the mirror of the Word of God which acquits and blesses us, which is itself the love of God to us. The man who loves God will let himself be told and will himself confess that he is not in any sense righteous as one who loves and in his loving before and over against God. On the contrary, he is a sinner who even in his love has nothing to bring and offer to God. The love of God for him is that God intercedes for him and represents him even though he is so unworthy, even though he can never be anything but unworthy and therefore undeserving of love. (390)⁴⁵

The self-knowledge described here is, therefore, not a self-discovery arising from the subject’s own search for itself, but rather the effect of a hearing, a being told. The activity it gives rise to (as we shall see shortly) is a profession of the truth that has been learned. This sort of indirect self-reflection and self-discovery is the only form of theological self-reflection with which Barth is comfortable. It produces a knowledge that humbles and redirects the self from its improper fixation on a now devalued object towards the proper object of love. Since the Word is always spoken through a creaturely medium, and most often through voices of other humans (biblical authors, theological commentators, preachers, etc.) it demands an orientation toward these voices and thus an orientation within Christian discourse: “Grace points them away from self, frightens them out of themselves, deprives them of any root or soil or country in themselves, summons

⁴⁵ In this mirror, Barth explains, we see ourselves as loved by God although utterly unworthy of that love and incapable, out of our own resources, of loving God in return, yet nevertheless beloved (373, 382-4).

them to hold to the promise, to trust in Him, to boast in Him, to take guidance and counsel of Him and Him alone” (394).⁴⁶

⁴⁶ As McCormack has shown, Barth’s theology assumes the success and viability of Kant’s critique of metaphysics and Kant’s epistemology as it touches on the knowledge of empirical reality, and Barth accepts Kant’s account of the limits of human knowing in order to keep God beyond the grasp of human knowledge (Bruce L. McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008], 125). In his lectures on nineteenth century protestant theology, delivered in the early 1930s and first published in 1947, Barth locates his own theological project (one that aspires to the knowledge to which divine revelatory activity gives rise) in relation to other theological trajectories that have taken seriously Kant’s critique. This discussion, when read alongside §6 of *Church Dogmatics* I/1, sheds light on Barth’s efforts in his prolegomena to situate his dogmatic project in a critical relationship to its liberal Protestant theological heritage.

Kant’s philosophical contribution represents for Barth the self-chastening of an excessively confident and boundless Enlightenment subjectivity. It is a watershed event that divides the future channels into which an intellectually sophisticated theology will flow. The critical activity by which reason comes to an understanding of its own limits serves both to humble and embolden an enlightened attitude toward external authorities (Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History* [London: SCM Press, 1972], 36-7, 269-71). Knowing its limits, the enlightened spirit is freed to subject itself to the dictates of reason alone. Thus, Barth writes, “[What was previously] the absolute and boundless self-affirmation of reason,” becomes after Kant, “a relative and bounded self-affirmation of reason, critical and now for the first time sure of itself” (272). Barth’s concern is with the costs this critique exacts from a reformed doctrine of revelation: a doctrine that speaks of a God who has become knowable in the empirically-intuitable existence of Jesus Christ; a doctrine that finds its proper criterion in the biblical witness to Christ. Barth finds no place within Kant’s framework for such an account, for Kant argues that theoretical reason lacks any criterion by which to distinguish a supposed experience of God’s self-revelation from any other experience. Since it is practical reason’s generation of a God ideal that provides the criterion by which to judge religious claims about an empirically discernible revelation, “the moral law within” must take the place of revelation as a constant source of wonder and reverence (282-3, 304).

In Barth’s telling of the history of nineteenth century protestant theology, Kant’s critique frames the only options available to a theology that wants to retain academic credibility. Barth identifies three alternatives to Kant. The first is to remain within Kant’s constraints and to privilege reason’s practical criterion as the central standard for theology (a path taken by Barth’s neo-kantian predecessors). The second follows the path of the Schleiermacher. In subjecting a Kantian framework to further critique it locates theology’s criterion in a third a priori capacity alongside theoretical and practical reason—that of feeling. Feeling serves as the locus for an unmediated God consciousness on which a distinctive mode of theological reflection will depend (305-6; 316, 341). Neither alternative goes far enough for Barth in questioning the constraints of Kant’s epistemological framework, for both locate theology’s criterion in a capacity or faculty of the human subject. Barth locates a third alternative on the boundaries of a Kantian philosophy of religion, in dialogue with it but not submitting to its governance. From this critical vantage point, Barth retracts the Kantian limits to exclude any internal capacity or evaluative criterion for knowledge of God (305). From this vantage point he puts the constraints of a Kantian framework into question because he understands himself to be answerable to a higher power and governed from a different source (306-7, 308-11).

Church Dogmatics is Barth’s attempt at this third alternative: a theology that locates its criterion in God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ. This revelation becomes accessible through the biblical witness to Christ and ecclesial reflection on that witness. The divine address is received by the subject through the vehicle of human words, but these words can only be recognized as divine address where God intervenes to enable the hearer to recognize in human language, the hidden voice of God. Barth insists on the utter incapacity of human beings to hear the divine address, and the incapacity of human words to be the vehicle of this address. A miraculous conferral, a divine act that makes possible the humanly impossible, must bring about this hearing if it is to be had at all. If human beings retain no such capacity for knowledge of God then they also retain no capacity (or resource) for the recognition of themselves and others as creatures of God. Both divine and creaturely others remain fundamentally unknowable. Knowledge is had only where it is divinely conferred from without. (I/1, 241, 246-7, 408; I/2, 64-5, 258, 265-7, 506-7, 512-14; see fn. 59 below for more on the Kantian framework for Barth’s doctrine of revelation).

In I/1, §6, Barth describes the subjective side of the event in which humans hear the Word of God and thus acquire knowledge of God, and he situates this discussion in relation to his critique of Protestant liberalism’s

This divine act, this gift of grace, enables obedience to the command it imposes by evoking the desire for God and thus the very search for God that is itself the love for God:

We cannot be satisfied with repentance as such (especially if it is sincere). We cannot be satisfied with self-knowledge (especially if it does not mean assurance but a burning need). Beyond our own quite conscious lovelessness, and therefore without even dreaming that with our love we can offer anything to God, we begin genuinely, and in need, and with a consuming desire to know, to ask about the One who has first loved us. (391)

interest in religious “experience” (*Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* [I/1, 193/ 201]), especially Schleiermacher’s “religious consciousness” (*religiösen Bewußtsein* [198/207]). In the process he locates his *Dogmatics* in relation to a theological heritage that he finds is far too engrossed with the experience of the human subject, its self-awareness and self-confidence. He sets out to undermine any confidence or self-certainty the theologian might have for making the psychological experience of revelation a resource for doing theology. In so doing, he gives an account of how theology ought to be pursued, in view of the theologian’s complete incapacity for knowledge of God and dependency on divine activity. He locates the vantage point the theologian ought to occupy, the arena from which resources are drawn, as well as the self-doubt and confident hope in God’s readiness to be known--the epistemic virtues which ought to characterize the endeavor. Emerging is a picture of a human subject robbed of itself as a resource for doing theology, robbed of any confidence in its own capacity to know God (whether that knowledge comes through experience, history or scripture). If it is to know God it must orient itself within the ecclesial witness to the revelation of God in Christ—assuming the stance of one who hopes, expects, and so seeks to hear the divine Word in these human words. Barth depicts this orientation as a continual movement toward a fresh hearing of the Word, a movement motivated by the hope and expectation evoked by the Church’s repetition of the promise that God has and will speak again and again within its sphere. It is with the confidence of expectancy, rather than any certainty in their own experiences, that theologians ought to go about their task.

The stance that Barth prescribes for the theologian is necessarily critical because it cannot assume that any set of claims definitively speak for God. This stance is therefore not a fixed attitude or set of thoughts. Rather, Barth describes it as a movement—a movement in which one is led from blindness to sight to blindness again. It is not a steady incline from one moment of divine unveiling to another, but rather a movement from mountain tops to valleys, from one moment of hearing the “God with us” unveiled in ecclesial discourse, and the next moment seeing only the veil of human words (175, 179). What this means for theologians’ responsibility to interlocutors of the past is laid out in the opening pages of Barth’s published lectures on nineteenth century protestant theology. He notes that those thinkers from a previous era, with whom the theologian engages, use a language, grammar, and style so different from one’s own that their thought poses a crisis for the contemporary theologian. One must be open to allowing them to pose the questions to oneself, and thus to put oneself and one’s own framework into question. The moment we close ourselves off from their questioning, Barth claims, we subsume them into our own framework and thus no longer allow them to have their say. Here Barth suggests a stance toward other human beings that temporarily suspends judgment, at least long enough to be open to the confrontation and challenge the other poses from his or her different way of viewing and ordering reality (*Protestant Theology*, 24-8). It is Barth’s insistence on the concealed nature of divine self-disclosure that demands this critical positioning of the subject. Whether confronted by divine or human others, Barth’s claim is that the moment we rest confident that we have truly heard and understood them is the moment we start listening and conversing only with ourselves.

Barth’s insistence on our utter epistemological incapacity for and dependence on the divine address suggests a critical perspective that refuses to accept any particular set of theological claims (whether one’s own or another’s) as exhaustive, definitive, or final. It requires theologians to push at the limits of their own frame of reference in order to hear the questions posed by another that is irreducible to and resists their ways of ordering the world. Because a genuine recognition of divine and creaturely others so thoroughly depends on God’s illuminating activity, and thus on a conferral that must be granted again and again, the theological task is to return continually to the multiple (often competing) frameworks, voices, sources and texts that provide the materials for theological reflection. Theologians should hope to find themselves disoriented by the questions these many others pose to them. This construal of the theologian’s relationship to other human beings is also operative in his §18 depiction of the theologian’s relationship to the human neighbor.

Thus the divine gift of love lends both direction and desire to the seeking. However, Barth reminds his reader that this seeking, although divinely evoked, is always a human activity and effort to love. The properly humbled subject can never rest assured that his or her seeking is a proper loving and therefore a proper seeking, nor should he or she even pause to reflect on this question. Barth does not want his reader to become distracted by the search itself (yet another form of self-reflection); but rather he wants eyes transfixed on the voices of Christian discourse, the media from which direction to one's search must be given again and again, and always through grace, if it is to be had at all. Since the love for God (*the* great commandment) requires a repeated redirecting of the self, the human activity that seeks to fulfill the commandment is an activity that is propelled by this need and hope for redirection:

Yet this being and activity acquires a direction at the point where everything is done for us, the direction Godward in Jesus Christ. And this is no special work. It is far more. It is the work of all works.... What matters is emphatically not the fact that we are seeking. What matters is that if we accept and adopt this direction, we are always seekers. Of course, that means that we are seeking. But in all that seeking we are again in the sphere of our lovelessness and unworthiness of being loved. In spite of our seeking, we can still be rejecting. Our seeking may be upright, inward and profound, but as such it will stand in constant need of the forgiveness of sins. What justifies the seeking is only the fact that we seek as real seekers. And that means that it is only He whom we seek and who has again and again made us seekers, who in our existence has thrown us back utterly upon the forgiveness of sins through Him. (392)

Barth thus prescribes for the would-be lover of God a ceaseless activity, compelled by desire and hope that does not wait for assurance that it has been given its proper direction, but seeks in blind hope of being led to and found by God.⁴⁷ It will always be a misguided quest in search of and hope for continual redirection. This quest is precisely what theological activity is at its best, as Barth had described and performed it throughout *Church Dogmatics* I. Barth configures the love

⁴⁷ "How can love to God be inactive? It is all activity, but only as man's answer to what God has said to him. As this answer it is a work, and it produces works. But it is a work, and produces works, in the fact that it is the witness of God's work, and therefore a renunciation of all self-glorying and all claims." (401)

of neighbor as the outer sign of this inner quest. The neighbor functions as the material and tangible reference point that is imposed on the subject; the neighbor is the proper object toward which the would-be lover of God directs her or his seeking activity.

Notably for my argument in subsequent chapters, Barth speaks briefly in this context of an “irreversible order,” an “above” and a “below.” This is language that has recurred often in the first volume of *Church Dogmatics* and will recur frequently in the third volume (most notoriously in his efforts to subordinate the activity of “woman” in obedience to the activity of “man”) but, it is used here only in passing, in a passage of fine print, and in order to bolster Barth’s efforts to distinguish the love of God from the human responding love. Refuting any notion that these two acts of love (the human and the divine) are identical or exchangeable, he insists that in finding ourselves loved by God we find ourselves to be differentiated from God, and only in this differentiation do we love God. In the two acts “we have here an irreversible order of that which is above and that which is below, of predetermination and self-determination, of God and man” (376).⁴⁸ In this context the distinction in the order of agencies is due to the “miraculous” divine enabling of a response otherwise not possible. Barth will not make use of this sort of ordered distinction in agencies when he turns to discuss the subject’s relationship to his or her neighbor; in fact the precise character of the neighbor’s agency will remain veiled and elusive. The other’s obscurity, I will argue shortly, serves a critical function in §18 that undermines any view of the other as subordinate or inferior to the self.

⁴⁸ He refers briefly to “the majestic superordination” of God’s love and the human love for God (395). He also uses similar language in distinguish the subject’s love for God from love for neighbor, locating the former in the eternal coming kingdom and the latter in the present and passing world: “we are in fact dealing with a first and a second commandment, a primary and a secondary, a superior and a subordinate, an eternal and a temporary. The two times and worlds are not symmetrical. They do not balance each other. The one prevails over the other. That which comes and remains has priority and superiority over that which now is and passes” (410).

THE OUTER SIGN: THE LOVE OF NEIGHBOR

The different features of Barth's exposition of the first commandment recur in his even lengthier exposition of the second commandment as presented in Mark 12: 29-31: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (401-454). Within a fine print section of this analysis Barth re-describes the Lucan pericope of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-35), in which Jesus uses the parable to identify the neighbor who is to be the object of the second commandment (417-19). In so doing Barth preforms the role of one who listens to the biblical authors as they present to him a scene in which a misguided, self-justifying, and self-loving lawyer must learn from Jesus the identity of the neighbor for whom he is responsible. In his reading of this pericope, as we shall see shortly, Barth reenacts for his reader a multi-layered scene of confrontation with neighbors. The parable provides him the narrative template for his subsequent exposition of the second commandment. He will present the neighbor as the medium of a dialectally structured, revelatory event that bestows the divine gift of knowledge and commands a response.

As Barth describes it, the Lucan narrative presents a scene in which Jesus redirects the self-justifying search of a lawyer of Israel by disclosing to him the neighbor whom he must love. The lawyer, as Barth describes him, is "a doctor of the Law in Israel": "outward and by appearance, by his very calling, he belongs to the community of Yahweh," and claims to be "a prominent member" of it, a participator in its divine promises, and one who knows and is able to recite the commandments of God (417). The lawyer asks Jesus how he might inherit eternal life. When Jesus asks him what answer the law provides, the lawyer recites the two great commandments, the love of God and the love of neighbor. But when the lawyer asks Jesus who his neighbor is he shows himself to be neither ready for nor capable of fulfilling these

commands: not knowing who his neighbor is, he does not know who God is. He approaches Jesus as one who seeks, but he seeks in the wrong direction, for while it is Jesus to whom he brings these questions, he does not see and recognize Jesus as the one whom he ought to seek; he remains preoccupied with himself. And so he comes to Jesus seeking to “justify himself” (v. 29), not knowing that “only by mercy can he live and inherit eternal life.” Since he does not know his neighbor and therefore does not live by mercy, he lives instead “by his own intention and ability to present himself as a righteous man before God” (417). Jesus responds to this misdirected inquiry (“who is my neighbor?”) by telling a parable that holds a mirror up to the lawyer, reflecting the lawyer’s own neediness and gesturing to the true neighbor who is able to help. “A man who fell among thieves” lies half-dead and neglected by the passing priest and Levite, but is attended to “without hesitation and with unsparing energy” by the Samaritan. When Jesus asks which of the three proved himself a neighbor to this man, the lawyer replies “he that showed mercy on him” (418).

Barth’s re-telling of the parable hinges on this precise identification—that the neighbor to be recognized is not the needy fallen Israelite (who represents to the lawyer and reader a duty and obligation), but rather the Samaritan who out of his excess bestows an unmerited gift on the needy one. Barth performs the part of one whose expectations and assumptions have been unsettled by this disclosure. He tells the reader that contrary to the exegesis of many of his contemporaries, this identity of the neighbor is,

the only point of the story, unequivocally stated by the text. For the lawyer, who wants to justify himself and therefore does not know who is his neighbour, is confronted not by the poor wounded man with his claim for help, but by the anything but poor Samaritan who makes no claim at all but is simply helpful. It is the Samaritan who embodies what he wanted to know. This is the neighbour he did not know. (418)

Barth thus rhetorically performs for the reader the surprise reversal and reorientation that Jesus imposes on the lawyer's misguided search for self-justification and also on the misguided search of Barth's readers (if they have ears to hear):

All very unexpected: for the lawyer had first to see that he himself is the man fallen among thieves and lying helpless by the wayside; then he has to note that the others who pass by, the priest and the Levite, the familiar representatives of the dealings of Israel with God, all one after the other do according to the saying of the text: "He saw him and passed by on the other side;" and third, and above all, he has to see that he must be found and treated with compassion by the Samaritan, the foreigner, whom he believes he should hate, as one who hates and is hated by God. He will then know who is his neighbour, and will not ask concerning him as though it were only a matter of the casual clarification of a concept. He will then know the second commandment, and consequently the first as well. He will then not wish to justify himself, but will simply love the neighbour, who shows him mercy. He will then love God, and loving God will inherit eternal life. (418)

Barth's point is that one does not discover one's neighbor on a self-motivated path toward self-justification; rather one is discovered by one's neighbor when such self-affirming exercises are interrupted by the benefit that the other confers on the self, a benefit that exposes the self's neediness. Barth thus foregrounds the gospel of grace embodied in the neighbor, and only then does he turn to describe the duty of law that the neighbor imposes.

Barth continues, "in fact the lawyer does not see his own helplessness. He does not see that the priest and the Levite bring him no help and the Samaritan does. He does not really know his neighbour" (418). In another surprise turn in the narrative, as Barth re-produces it, Jesus gives a challenge to this man who is incapable of recognizing himself in the mirror held up to him, and thus is incapable of fulfilling the two commandments: he commands him to "Go and do thou likewise"; be a benefactor to another, imitate the Samaritan, and thus be one who brings "comfort, help, the Gospel to someone else" (419). This is surprising, Barth observes, because Jesus does not impose the law on the lawyer: he does not command the lawyer to love God and neighbor, as Jesus's hearers (and Barth's readers) might expect. Without waiting for the lawyer

to properly recognize his neighbor, Jesus summons him to act and imitate the merciful acts of another, and so to seek and find his neighbor:

We see and have a neighbour when we show mercy on him and he therefore owes us love. We see and have a neighbour when we are wholly the givers and he can only receive. We see and have him when he cannot repay us and especially when he is an enemy, someone who hates us and injures us and persecutes us (Mt. 543f). (419)

Thus the obligation imposed upon a misguided, misdirected and needy subject is a performance aimed at imitating the example of the Samaritan benefactor.

Barth pauses to ask why Jesus should demand this sort of merciful activity of one “who obviously does not see or have a compassionate neighbour, who lacks all the necessary presuppositions.” Barth’s answer, delivered in a final narrative-twist, is to direct the reader to the one who delivers the summons: “On His lips the ‘Go and do thou likewise’ is only Law because it is first Gospel. The good Samaritan, the neighbour who is a helper and will make him a helper, is not far from the lawyer....He stands before him incarnate, although hidden under the form of one whom the lawyer believed he should hate, as the Jews hated the Samaritans” (419). Barth thus presents Jesus as the paradigmatic figure of the neighbor. But we never learn, Barth notes, whether the lawyer does in fact attempt to imitate Christ and thus truly to perform the law he recites so well (419). The inner orientation of this lawyer, who is summoned by Christ to outwardly enact the part of the neighbor, remains concealed from the view of the reader.

Barth’s reading of the parable provides the narrative template for his exposition of the second commandment that follows. Barth reproduces the dialectical relationship between gospel and law that he finds within the narrative. He imitates its order in the very structuring of his exposition, for he talks first of the grace or benefit conferred by the neighbor, and only then of the law or command this benefit imposes. The Samaritan and the fallen Israelite function as figurative representations of the two sides of a dialectical event in which the subject is

confronted by the neighbor: the Samaritan represents for Barth the benefit the neighbor confers while the fallen Israelite foregrounds the neediness that the neighbor also embodies, the very revelation of which is the benefit. My neighbor, Barth tells his reader, is a revelatory event mediated not through humanity or any specific group of persons, but through “the fellow-man who emerges from amongst all others as my benefactor” (421).⁴⁹ In my neighbor, I am confronted with a benefactor who confers a gift that exposes my own neediness and reminds me of the gift embodied in the incarnate Word. As such the neighbor’s benefit can only be received and cannot be earned, and this conferral imposes on me the obligation to act as a neighbor in turn. In this capacity, embodying both gospel and law and representing the incarnate Christ, the neighbor “faces us as the bearer and representative of the divine compassion,” and as “the instrument of that order which is so necessary and indispensable for us in this time and world, in which God wills to be praised by us for His goodness” (416). In this capacity the neighbor “proclaims and shows forth Jesus Christ within this world,” and imposes on me the obligation to also be “a bearer and representative of that divine mercy in the world” (421). In this capacity, then, Barth refers to the neighbor as a sacramental event in which “I am actually placed before Christ” (429). By encountering me through this creaturely medium, God imposes the neighbor on me as the material reference point for my Godward-directed loving activity.

As a revelatory sign my neighbor benefits me by functioning as a mirror that reflects my own need and, in so doing, as a sign that points to the humanity of Christ. I have a neighbor

⁴⁹ “Every fellow-man can act towards me in this way, not, of course, in virtue of the fact that he is a man or that he is this particular man, but in virtue of the fact that he can have the commission and authority to do so....My neighbour is the man who emerges from amongst all my fellow-men as this one thing in particular, my benefactor.” (420) Barth goes on to note that I have a decisive part to play in this event, for to have a neighbor I must be ready to go and do likewise, to hear the summons my neighbor represents to me (420).

when I recognize in the will and activity of the other the misery and neediness that I share with him or her:

His actual misery consists in the fact that he wills, wills to live, and yet—with or without mask, openly or secretly, perhaps indeed without knowing it himself—he cannot, cannot live, and is therefore caught in an always hopeless and hopelessly repeated and varied attempt to do so. If I recognise him in this, if with whatever feelings I see this as his oppression, shame and torment, I recognise in him my neighbour. (428-9)

This reflection has its efficacy not in the specific emotive responses it might evoke in me, whether pity, surprise, horror, resignation, or even admiration (428-9),⁵⁰ but rather as it unsettles, humbles and redirects me toward the neighbor. Barth explains, first, that I will not like what I see of myself in this mirror and will want to repudiate the existence of the neighbor who exposes this truth:

This neighbour will cause me a really mortal headache. I mean, he will seriously give me cause involuntarily to repudiate his existence and in that way to put myself in serious danger. In face of this neighbour I certainly have to admit to myself that I would really prefer to exist in some other way than in this co-existence. I would prefer this because from this neighbour a shadow falls inexorably and devastatingly upon myself. (431)

Second, this self-exposure undermines any sense of superiority I might have over the other. This shared fellowship in misery has a leveling effect that is profoundly disconcerting and that allows

⁵⁰ This recognition does not require pity, for the neighbor might not look needy in the sense that the man fallen among thieves looked. In fact “we may feel surprise and awe at his human greatness, or terror at his fate, or horror at his nature or lack of it, or resignation at his character and conduct, whatever they are” (428-9). The feelings the neighbor evokes are not what is of importance for Barth, but rather the question of whether I recognize in the other my own plight, the futility of my own activity: “The wretched fellow-man beside me simply reveals to me in his existence my own misery. For can I see him in the futility and impotence of his attempt to live, without at once *mutatis mutandis* recognising myself? If I really see him, if as *propinquissimus* he is brought into such close contact with me that, unconfused by any intersecting feelings which may influence me, I can only see his misery, how can it be otherwise? This is the criterion: if it is otherwise, if I can still see him without seeing myself, then for all the direct sympathy I may have for him, for all the zeal and sacrifice I may perhaps offer him, I have not really seen him....The neighbour shows me that I myself am a sinner. How can it be otherwise, seeing he stands in Christ's stead, seeing he must always remind me of Him as the Crucified? How can he help but show me, as the reflection of myself, what Christ has taken upon Himself for my sake? The divine mission and authority which the neighbour has in relation to me, the mercy which he shows me, is not to be separated from this revelation” (431).

no one person any advantage over another (430-1).⁵¹ To love one's neighbor is therefore to submit to the humbling order that the neighbor imposes on oneself (434-5).⁵²

The neighbor acquires his or her sacramental significance by reflecting not only my sin and need but Christ redemptive work:

The neighbour shows me that I myself am a sinner. How can it be otherwise, seeing he stands in Christ's stead, seeing he must always remind me of Him as the Crucified? How can he help but show me, as the reflection of myself, what Christ has taken upon Himself for my sake? The divine mission and authority which the neighbour has in relation to me, the mercy which he shows me, is not to be separated from this revelation. (431)

The neighbor is, in this gratuitous revelatory sense, the sacramental sign of the grace of God embodied in the humanity of Christ:

And his benefaction to us as a suffering fellow-creature in need of help consists in the fact that even in his misery he shows us the true humanity of Jesus Christ, that humanity which was not triumphant but submissive, not healthy and strong, but characterised by the bearing of our sins, which was therefore flesh of our flesh—the flesh abandoned to punishment, suffering and death. Our fellow-man in his oppression, shame and torment confronts us with the poverty, the homelessness, the scars, the corpse, at the grave of Jesus Christ. (428-9)

The mirror of the neighbor thus establishes between self and other a shared fellowship with the human misery and need of Jesus. By reflecting my need the neighbor reminds me of the forgiveness I have received: "Whether willingly and wittingly or not, in showing it, my neighbour acquires for me a sacramental significance. In this capacity he becomes and is a

⁵¹ "Why should we not be on relatively quiet and comfortable terms with our fellow-man so long as we do not see his actual misery and are therefore in a position, either to rejoice and find strength in what we regard as his strength and health and victoriousness, or in his tragic greatness, in relation to what we regard as his plight and need of help, to use our own surplus energies to improve his position and in that way, in the enjoyment of the superior position which we thereby adopt, to do ourselves a real kindness and perhaps more? The fellow-man who is unaware of his actual plight, the fellow-man to whom we can look and about whom we can concern ourselves, above all the fellow-man who helps to confirm and enhance us in the role of benefactor, mentor and ameliorator: this fellow-man does not constitute any serious problem, and any headaches which he may incidentally cause will not be mortal. But this in the last resort not at all disconcerting fellow-man is not our neighbour in the sense of the second commandment. He is not the one who, sent and authorised by God, shows mercy upon us." (430-1)

⁵² "Therefore once again to love the neighbour necessarily means that we actually allow him, just as he is, and as we see him, to do the service which he has to do us. But again that means that we allow him to call us to order, to remind us of our place. Our place is not that of those who boast of a possession and have therefore to substantiate a claim." (434-5)

visible sign of invisible grace, a proof that I, too, am not left alone in this world, but am borne and directed by God” (436). As a sacramental event, this reminder is something of which I am in continual, and it is therefore an event that must be reiterated.

It is in recollecting Christ’s mercy that the divine command is communicated in this confrontation with the neighbor. Following the dialectic from gospel to law,⁵³ Barth speaks next of the duty to the other, and here an epistemic veil strategically intervenes in Barth’s account. We cannot know if our neighbor is aware of the grace of which she or he has reminded us, and out of this ignorance our responsibility to the neighbor arises:⁵⁴

The fact that in our need we look to God in Jesus Christ and listen to His Word and then love God afresh and this time truly, is something which, if it happens, we can only accept as grace. And that is how we stand here and now towards our neighbour, with the difference that while we can, of course, accept grace for ourselves, we cannot accept it for him. We can know that God loves him, and that His Word is for him. But we cannot know that in his need he looks to God and listens to His Word and is comforted. (438)

It is because we do not know this, and because our neighbor has conferred this benefit on us, that we must expect to find in our neighbor one who shares with us the continual need of this sacramental reminder of God’s grace; we must therefore act as those who hope to become signs to our neighbor of Christ’s redemptive love (438).⁵⁵

⁵³ “His claim and our responsibility are a direct result of the fact that he has done us a service and benefit as a living sign of the grace of God. In relation to our neighbour, then, the road does not lead, as we are often told, from Law to Gospel—there is no road that way—but from Gospel to Law.” (438)

⁵⁴ “We cannot know that we also stand with him in the fellowship of grace and forgiveness. Even the closest personal acquaintance will not allow us any unconcern in this respect. Even the strongest conjectures we have of him in respect of this fellowship will not reduce the definite assumption that he is always just as much in new need of this looking and listening as we are. And for that reason, I cannot discharge my duty to him simply by summoning him to love God with me.” (439)

⁵⁵ “That the duty of love is the duty of witness results from the fact that I am summoned by my encounter with the neighbour to expect to find in him a brother of Jesus Christ and therefore my own brother. I do not know this. I cannot perceive it in my neighbour. All the more reason, therefore, why I should definitely believe it of him when he actually proclaims to me the grace of God, when he acts towards me as a servant of God, when he has acquired for me this sacramental significance. If he has reminded me that I live by forgiveness, how can I not be summoned to assume the same of him? How can I believe that he will have a different future from myself? How can I not think of

The performance that Barth now prescribes for his reader embraces the entire self. I am not to pronounce commandments and laws to the other (for Jesus did not impose the law on the lawyer), but rather, in my speech, acts and attitude, I am to imitate the neighbor(s) modeled for me in the biblical narratives (439). Barth presents an ethic for a specifically theological practice, and so the role to be imitated is that of witness to Christ (a role best modeled for Barth by the biblical authors). As would-be neighbor and sign, I must speak to the other of the grace I have experienced. While this does, Barth admits, requires *some* talk about one's self (and so a risky return to the self), it must first of all be talk of oneself as a recipient of divine aid; it is therefore an indirect reflection on the self, channeled through the language of Christian discourse, but spoken specifically in regard to the effects the biblical and ecclesial witness to Christ has had on the self. Second, my speech must be accompanied by acts of assistance directed toward the need of my neighbor as that need comes to external expression in "specific sicknesses, derangements and confusions of his psycho-physical existence" (444). Such effort at providing temporary and partial mitigation and relief of the neighbor's need might itself function as sign of hope to him or her that this need will find its limit in Christ (445-6). Finally, in my entirety I must enact the sort of attitude, disposition, and mood that corresponds to these words and acts:

If my words and acts are real witness to Jesus Christ, then in, with and under them there is an additional and decisive something of my own subjection to the lordship of Jesus Christ, of the comfort of forgiveness, by which I myself live, of the liberty of the children of God in which I myself move. It is additional, i.e., it too speaks to my neighbour in my words and deeds as such. It is an atmosphere which touches and surrounds him. The neighbour hears my few words and enjoys my little assistance. But *he also notices that I myself look and listen where my words and deeds seem to invite him to look and listen.* What I have to say to him is perhaps in itself very clear and true, a very clear and firm indication of the one thing necessary. (447-8, my italics)

And so in speech, word, orientation, and disposition I must model a life reordered by grace.

him that as one who is loved by God he will love God in return? It is this faith in respect of him that I now have to live out. And the living out of this faith is the witness to which he has a claim and which I owe him." (441)

What Barth calls for here is a performance that cannot live up to the norm it aspires to imitate. Barth hastens to remind the reader that the efficacy of this performance is not something his readers have control over: “if there is to be a real praise of God and love of our neighbour in our activity, there has to take place an activity of God which we with our activity can only serve, and which from the standpoint of our activity can only have the character of a miracle” (450). It is a role to be enacted in faith in, and hope for, this miracle:

We have to trust in the fact that Jesus Christ will be present in this meeting with my neighbour. It will be His business, not mine, and however badly I play my part, He will conduct His business successfully and well. We have to rely on the fact that it is Jesus Christ who has given me a part in His business; that He has not done so in vain; that He will make use of my service, and in that way make it real service, even though I do not see how my service can be real service....These are not guarantees. They can only be an assurance. But this assurance is required of us when we are commanded: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. It is only in this assurance that obedience is possible. (453)

Thus Barth prescribes for the reader a ceaseless imitative performance. Neither my inability to become what I attempt to enact nor the necessity of the miracle in giving my activity its efficacy relieve me of the responsibility of playing the part of the neighbor. Like the lawyer in the parable, I may not even recognize my neighbor, I may be on a misguided quest for self-justification, and yet nevertheless I am summoned to act, and so to imitate the model-neighbors presented to me in the biblical witness:

what can I do to ensure that the picture which I offer in my person is evangelical and not heathen or legal? What can I do about the disposition and mood and atmosphere which I spread? ‘The redeemed must look redeemed.’ But can we do anything to make this so? Now it cannot be denied that at bottom this is not a question of things right outside the realm of human possibility and decision. If it is required of us that we should be ready for the service to which we are appointed not only in word and deed but also in attitude, too much is not required of us. The limits of our responsibility do not, of course, coincide with the limits of our consciousness of responsibility, to which we might perhaps appeal. Once our attention is drawn to it, there is much we can do in relation to our inward and outward attitude; not everything, but one thing at least and perhaps the most important thing of all. The redeemed can very well look a little like redeemed. (449)

A ceaseless activity is required: the inner reality of the subject's search for (love for) God must be expressed in the outer sign of activity directed toward the other.

THE JEWISH SAMARITAN: AN ETHICAL CRITIQUE OF THE *VÖLKISCH* CHURCH

Having followed Barth's construal of the neighbor to its performative conclusions, we are in a position now to see Barth's own theological description of the neighbor as itself the discursive performance of one who hopes to be a neighbor, a sacramental sign of grace, to the reader. He plays for the reader the part of one who is confronted by a neighbor in the authorial voices of biblical narratives, as these voices speak to him of the neighbor they have encountered in Christ. He performs the role of one who recognizes himself in both the lawyer and the fallen Israelite and who hears along with the lawyer Christ's command to "Go and do likewise," to imitate the Samaritan, and so to imitate Christ. In his reading and exposition of the parable Barth thus draws the reader into a mimetic chain of recognition and re-description, and he incites the reader to also play the part. In this way he continues to enact and exemplify for the reader the part he has been playing throughout the first volume of *Church Dogmatics*: the part of one who imitates a way of responding to and speaking of the Word that he finds exemplified in the biblical text (in the voices, speech, attitude, and orientation of the prophets and the apostles—the witnesses to the Word). Barth elsewhere states that the dogmatician should seek to exemplify a relationship to the revelatory Word that is modeled in the voices and the stance of the biblical witnesses to revelation. In the "orientation of their thinking and speaking," in their "outlook, approach and method," the biblical writers are prototypes and exemplars that the dogmatician ought to emulate and in so doing serve likewise as an example for church proclamation (I/2, 816-7). In §18 Barth configures these voices as neighbors, and he gestures to the biblical texts

themselves as potential occasions for encounter with a neighbor: “Who and what a neighbour is, we can best realise from those who founded the Church, the biblical prophets and apostles. What they do is the purest form of that work of divine mercy which is assumed by the children of God. They bear witness to Jesus Christ...But the same thing happens wherever the Church is the Church” (422). Along these same lines Barth states:

For if in the prophets and apostles we see men to whom Jesus Christ has become a neighbour, and they themselves have become helpful and compassionate neighbours by bearing witness to Him, if it has become a general possibility in the Church that men can have this function, then we must obviously be prepared and ready for the fact that man, our fellow-man generally, can become our neighbour, even where we do not think we see anything of the Church, i.e., in his humanity he can remind us of the humanity of the Son of God and show mercy upon us by summoning us in that way to the praise of God. (425)

Following the example he finds in these biblical neighbors, Barth models for the reader where to look (and where not to look) and imitates the role he sees performed in the Lucan narrative.⁵⁶

Read in this way, Barth plays the neighbor to the reader by inviting the reader to recognize him or herself in the lawyer, and to hear along with Barth the command to “Go and do thou likewise.” For if the lawyer, who seeks to justify himself (neither recognizing his own inability and need nor Christ’s ability to meet it), must recognize himself in the man fallen

⁵⁶ A series of books published over the past two decades has done much to unsettle the once widespread criticism that Barth’s preoccupation with divine agency leaves no space for genuine human agency. Most notable among these are John Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*; Webster, *Barth’s Moral Theology*; Gorringe, *Against Hegemony*; Nimmo, *Being in Action*; McKenny, *Analogy of Grace*. In this recent literature much attention has been given to Barth’s interconnection of dogmatics and ethics, however little attention has been paid to the rhetorical and performative strategies Barth uses in *Church Dogmatics* to model and elicit the modes of agency that he describes. My reading of Barth in this and subsequent chapters highlights the ways in which Barth’s dogmatic exercises and rhetorical strategies not only describe the moral field and the need for a conversion of intellectual habits (as, for instance Webster explains in *Moral Theology*, 80, 103), but also model for the reader the epistemic virtues, dispositions, and conceptual orientation proper to the doing of theology. In this respect *Church Dogmatics* I can be read as a pedagogical exercise in which Barth guides the reader in unlearning problematic intellectual habits. Stephen H. Webb, *Re-Figuring Theology* provides a sustained treatment of the rhetorical features of the second edition of Barth’s commentary on Romans which includes a discussion of the commentary’s ethical sections where Barth’s construal of the alterity of the neighbor in relation to divine alterity has affinities with §18 (Webb, 168-77). I share with Webb an interest in the rhetorical strategies that Barth uses to discursively enact the situation of the human agent. While Webb’s focus is Barth’s earlier work he does note differences between that earlier work and the style of *Church Dogmatics*, and he offers an illuminating discussion of similarities between Barth’s *Dogmatics* and the literary genre of realism emerging in the 19th century in reaction to Romanticism (154-65).

among thieves, so also must the reader. Whether or not the reader can recognize him or herself in this mirror, she or he must hasten to play the neighbor to another: “Where it has the form of the priest and Levite, that is, where this service is not offered, it is not the Church. In the Church we cannot wish to justify ourselves....In the Church we flee to Jesus Christ proclaimed, that is, to our neighbour, who offers us the service of proclaiming Jesus Christ” (422).

Barth’s performance can be read as enacting the sort of subversions and reorientations that he finds in the parable. When read with his contemporary context in mind, these subversive features come into view with greater clarity. Barth’s account effaces the boundaries of the visible Church, along whatever lines they might be drawn, and it situates those who might be deemed “outside,” within its boundaries as a potential means of grace. The implications of this account for contemporaneous efforts to enforce racial exclusions from church office are not far from the surface. The relationship of the fallen Israelite to the Samaritan enables Barth to argue that while the neighbor embodies a proclamation of the Word in his or her speech, deeds and disposition, the neighbor need not actually be a member of the visible Church in order to do so. In fact the neighbor may well be one who is perceived as indifferent or even hostile to the Church, one whom members of the Church think of as hated by and hating God, as the lawyer thought of the Samaritan, and also of Jesus (422, 418-9). Barth is clear that the true status of the other’s relationship to God cannot and does not need to be known for him or her to acquire this sacramental character (429, 438). The other’s capacity to become such a means of grace resides neither in his or her self-awareness nor in our knowledge of him or her (and certainly not in ethnic or religious differences), but in the revelatory act of the Word, and thus in the mystery of God’s freedom. The status of the other remains concealed from the self. The apparent “outsider” cannot therefore be treated or regarded as such: “It is in the light of this [divine] summons, of

the fact that simply as he is, as a man, he can be a neighbor to me here and now at any moment, as the Samaritan was to the man half-dead by the roadside, it is in this light, and not in the light of the fact that he is an outsider, that I must regard him from within the Church” (423). To view him in this way is to view him “in the reflection of the human nature of Jesus Christ.” And we are not simply to await this moment of recognition, we must “expect to find” such a neighbor in every individual (425).

As I noted earlier, Barth depicts human life, as it is lived out within the seemingly constant orders of life and society, as being in need of continual reorientation and redirection, and the neighbor enables this reorientation by becoming the tangible focal point for redirecting self-oriented activity. In subtle ways Barth’s description of the neighbor turns the tables on contemporaneous discussions about the racial delineation of a *völkisch* church. Barth can be read here as inviting his Christian German readers to recognize themselves in the self-justifying Jewish lawyer of the parable, who does not know his neighbor and so does not recognize Christ; the contemporary Jewish “foreigner” is aligned through the Samaritan with Christ, both of whom the lawyer thinks he should hate as objects of God’s hatred. This sort of reversal appears to be in play in Barth’s description of the “hidden neighbor”: At one point he refers to gentile outsiders to the nation of Israel, figures in the Old and New Testaments who are presented as “strangers who from the most unexpected distances come right into the apparently closed circle of the divine election and calling and carry out a kind of commission, fulfill an office for which there is no name, but the content of which is quite obviously a service which they have to render” (425). He names the well-known biblical figures of Balaam, Rahab, Ruth, the Queen of Sheba, Naaman, the wise men, the centurion of Capernaum, the Syro-Phoenician woman, the centurion at the cross, and finally, the paradigmatic figure of “Melchisedek, King of Salem, and a ‘priest of the

most high God,' who brings bread and wine to Abraham, blesses him and receives from him a tithe (Gen. 14.18f.)," who as such is the "hermeneutic key to this whole succession" (425).⁵⁷

The contemporaneous rhetoric of nation and blood relation are not far from the surface here.

Barth shifts quickly to talk of the New Testament equivalent term for "neighbor"—"brother"—and he invokes the language of "blood relationship" to refer to the relationship made possible between Jesus and those whom he calls into relation with himself. To be brother to Christ, Barth states, is to recognize Christ in the other: "in every man we have to expect a brother (for that only means a neighbor in the full sense of the word)" (426-7). In this way Barth detaches the biblical notion of neighbor and of brotherhood from any association with contemporaneous appeals to societal institutions of shared blood and nationhood, and he situates the terminology of neighbor, brother, and blood within a christological revelatory framework in which there is no "outside" to the sphere of God's grace and thus to the sphere of the Christian's ethical obligation.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ We see similar language in an earlier excursus where Barth appears to have in view his contemporaries' preoccupation with the Volk. Here Barth refuses any appropriation of an orders of creation from Luther and wants to detach notions of "national community" from Old Testament accounts of the neighbor. It is true, he notes that in the Old Testament, the fellow-Israelite is the primary referent for those passages that speak of the neighbour who is to be loved. He continues: "But note that in the Old Testament the 'people' is not primarily a national community of blood. The 'neighbour' also includes the frequently mentioned and by no means unimportant 'stranger within thy gates.' And the nation itself and as such is primarily the people of God....Even in the Old Testament it is only secondarily that it is this within the framework of a closed, but never absolutely closed, national community of blood....In light of the New Testament the secondary definition of neighbour cannot become primary (not even by extending it to all sorts of other orders of life and society)" (416).

⁵⁸ The use of the traditional Lutheran distinction between Law and Gospel for organizing the relationship between Christianity and Judaism was commonplace in debates among Protestant theologians and clergy about the mission to the Jews and also in their inter-religious dialogue with Jews. For a discussion of Jewish-Christian dialogue in the Weimar Republic (1918–1933), including different Protestant positions in relation to the rising antisemitism, see Ulrich Rosenhagen, "'Together a step towards the messianic goal': Jewish-Protestant encounter in the Weimar Republic," in *The Weimar Moment: Liberalism, Political Theology, and Law*, ed. Leonard V. Kaplan and Rudy Koshar (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2012), 47-72. Protestant theologians engaged in inter-religious dialogue with German Jewish intellectuals, and eager to maintain a mission to the Jews (which the German Christians would later reject) were motivated in part by a shared objection to the rise of antisemitism. But, Rosenhagen notes, they were always quick to highlight the differences between Judaism and Christianity, which they mapped onto a distinction between Law and Grace. Judaism was depicted as premodern and legalistic in its attitude towards salvation whereas Christianity was depicted as modern in its elevation of grace and forgiveness; the two religions

CONCLUSION

Throughout his exposition, Barth has strategically deployed sacramental language to describe the event of encounter with the neighbor. It is sacrament broadly construed, in which creaturely entities are divinely selected to become temporary mediums for the revelation of grace. I have argued that Barth's use of sacramental terminology targets and resists nationalistic efforts to exclude Jewish Christians from the German churches specifically by privileging orders of creation over the sacramental efficacy of baptism. Barth's account of the self's relation to the neighbor will aid my efforts in subsequent chapters to both foreground and critique Barth's gendered construal of the neighbor. In *Church Dogmatics* III, Barth will continue to configure the activity of the human other as a benefit that imposes an obligation, although he does not make use of sacramental terminology in order to do so. In his discussions of sexual difference he will locate the primary site of inter-human alterity in the sexually differentiated other, and the relationship of self to other will become an oppositional and binary relationship in which the masculine subject assumes a precedence and prerogative over a feminine "other." The masculine subject is to enact this prerogative by seeking her, choosing her, and speaking on behalf of her, while the "activity" of the feminine other is to await and respond to this masculine initiative. There are several features in Barth's depiction of the neighbor in §18 that will serve as my

were configured as contradicting each other in essence (56-7). To view Jews as objects of mission was commonplace among liberal theologians (58-9). Regarding the theologians engaged in dialogue with Jewish intellectuals, Rosenhagen concludes: "However liberal, modern, historical, or even philo-Semitic they might have considered themselves, they all operated under exclusivist theological distinctions, which made it impossible to fully embrace dialogue on theological grounds....All Protestant participants also vehemently fought anti-Semitism and all the racial ideologies that had crept into Christianity and which were beginning to dominate the political and cultural discourse in Weimar" (59). Barth's reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan can be understood as a continuation of this resistance to antisemitism. It remains within the framework of a Law/Grace distinction. In retelling the parable Barth is quick to emphasize the race, legalism, and self-justifying concerns of the lawyer which he sets in opposition to the grace Christ represents and speaks. The reading I have offered here of Barth's retelling of the narrative suggests, however, a destabilization of the commonplace alignment of Judaism with legalism and Christianity with grace; anyone anywhere in any religion might become the representative of grace; and those who are unable to recognize their neighbor, or who treat the other as an occasion for fulfilling the Law of God are in fact engaged in a legalistic pursuit of self-justification.

critical lens for analyzing Barth's later construction of the feminine other, especially as found in his reading of the Genesis creation narratives, to which I turn in my next two chapters.

First, the neighbor functions simultaneously as "a sign instituted by Christ" pointing to his suffering humanity and as a mirror within which the subject recognize his or her own humanity (435). We have seen Barth describe biblical texts and proclamation in a similar way. In this capacity the neighbor represents to the self a shared fellowship between self, other, and Christ. The neighbor communicates something new and unsettling to the self that undermines any basis for superiority or precedence of self over other. The self receives the gift of God through the other and is compelled to respond in an imitative activity that seeks to play the neighbor to another. We shall see shortly, in Barth's reading of the creation of Adam and Eve, that while Eve is presented as gift and neighbor to Adam, and while the function of Eve in many ways parallels the function of the Good Samaritan, it is Adam alone who is presented as a sign of Christ's humanity. Furthermore, Eve's silence is read by Barth as her assent to male initiative and prerogative.

Second, Barth describes this encounter as revelatory event, and so his dialectic of veiling and unveiling can be discerned here. It operates analogously to its function in the revelatory event in which the language of the Bible and church proclamation becomes a medium that communicates revelatory knowledge and summons the subject to belief and a confession of faith that gives public witness to this belief. The creaturely veil or medium intervenes between the self and the divine other, obscuring any direct epistemic access to the Word's relationship to the human subject (whether that subject is oneself or another human).⁵⁹ Barth's recurring use of the

⁵⁹ Barth depicts the hearing of the divine address in the revelatory event as an intersubjective exchange between God and the human subject. It is a mediated exchange, necessitating the intervention of human language, and this language is inadequate to the task--it retains no inherent capacity to enable our recognition of the divine speaker who puts it to use. In Barth's account, both the linguistic vehicle of divine address and the human response to that

category of mystery is in play here. On the one hand, it is the miracle of a divine act that selects one specific person from the many to be a neighbor to the self on any given occasion. The divine act is never, for Barth, fully transparent to the self: it always remains concealed in the creaturely medium that reveals it. Where that medium is human activity, it is human self-determination that conceals the divine determination of the subject. The divine selecting act cannot, therefore, be anticipated in advance, nor can one ever be too certain one has encountered it. This obscurity is in part what motivates the seeking, loving movement toward God that is to be expressed in activities directed toward the neighbor. One cannot anticipate who will be selected to fulfill this

address are mundane creaturely veils that conceal the self-disclosing act of the divine speaker, even as they become the vehicles for God's address. God's voice is hidden behind what Barth calls the "secularity" [*Welthaftigkeit*] of the Word of God, which cannot be transgressed (I/1, 165-78, 207/216). One can never rest thoroughly assured that what one has heard and responded to was truly an event of divine address. Should theologians pause long enough to reflect on their own experience, should they attempt to judge whether on a particular occasion the words they have heard and their thoughts about it were a response to divine activity, they will see only a set of human words, and only their own self-determining acts. Thus they cannot decide for themselves the question of whether their hearing is "the right hearing of obedience or the wrong hearing of disobedience" (200-1). The true nature of their response remains "in the secret judgment of the grace or disfavor of God, to whom alone [the theologian's] obedience or disobedience is manifest" (I/1, 201).

Bruce McCormack has clarified the critical realism of Barth's doctrine of revelation, in its relationship to a Kantian epistemology. Barth presupposes the validity of Kant's epistemology as it pertains to empirical reality and assumes the success of Kant's critique of metaphysics. By the time of the writing of *Church Dogmatics*, Barth's epistemological framework shared with a more traditional Kantianism a modest realism. Barth distinguishes phenomena (things as they appear to sense perception and are formed in the categories of understanding) from noumena (things in themselves), and like Kant, he does not doubt the existence of noumena—we know objects because they impose themselves on our sense perception from without and thus give rise to our knowing. Genuine knowledge of empirical reality is possible when the mind synthetically combines categories of the understanding with the intuition of data arising from sense perception. As McCormack explains, Barth's realism insists both on the activity of the knower and the necessary imposition of the known object on the cognitive apparatus. See McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 43-9; 130, and McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern*, 125. Within this epistemological framework, Barth depicts revelation as an act in which God becomes phenomenologically accessible as an intuitable object of knowledge in the incarnation. In the objective moment of God's revelation—the incarnation—God the Son becomes the hidden subject of Jesus's human life, veiling himself in a creaturely medium accessible to human knowing. God the Son retains his ontological distinction from Christ's human nature and thus is hidden or veiled within it from normal perception. In the subjective moment of God's revelation, a second divine act enables human cognition to recognize the divine subject concealed in this empirical object. Where God's self-revelation in Christ is known today, the biblical witness to Jesus Christ (and those theological utterances that take the bible to be normative) mediates that recognition. However, as McCormack explains, linguistic utterances do not share the same indirect identity with the Word that the human life of Jesus shares, not even those found in Scripture, for they can only become the medium for that identity through a miraculous act that enables these words to refer to the God revealed in Christ (*Orthodox and Modern*, 110-1, 125, 136). McCormack highlights the dialectical relationship between Barth's realism and actualism, one in which the empirical object imposes itself on human cognition only when the hidden divine subject acts to unveil itself in the object. Thus Barth unquestioningly assumes a Kantian epistemology while adapting and shaping it to his christology, and in such a way as to continually insist that a divine act is always necessary if God is to be known at all. Barth's appropriation thus extends and sets limits on Kant's understanding of critique (159).

function—one cannot anticipate who will become the neighbor that one seeks; therefore the sphere for this search has no clear boundaries. On the other hand, the other’s self-awareness and consciousness of the divine act is also *not* transparent to the subject, and, furthermore, the other’s self-awareness does not prevent him or her from being used by God for the benefit of the subject. Especially significant for my interests, Barth states explicitly that the subject cannot assent to God’s grace on behalf of the other. It is because of this opacity that the other always represents to the subject an obligation and responsibility. But in his later depiction of Adam’s recognition of Eve, Barth will not only see in Eve’s silence her transparent assent to Adam’s choice of her, but he will also insist that Adam’s naming of Eve represents his prerogative to speak on her behalf to God and to represent her acceptance of him to God: she simply chooses to let him speak and choose for her, desiring only to be what he desires in and from her.

Third, the veil has the strategic function of destabilizing the visible boundaries of the church (of those who profess the Christian faith and participate in the church’s community), since it does not allow these visible boundaries to demarcate the sphere of God’s revelatory activity and the responding human ethical activity. Barth notes that “the Samaritan in the parable shows us incontestably that even those who do not know that they are doing so, or what they are doing, can assume and exercise the function of the compassionate neighbor” (422). Neither the other’s self-knowledge nor his or her visible relationship to the church bars the other from becoming one who renders this service. Barth is emphatic on this point: even one who is hostile to the church can at any moment become a neighbor and testimonial of the grace of Christ, and so must not be regarded as an outsider. Thus Barth insists that his reader must expect to find a neighbor in every other person (423, 425, 427, 429), and so must play the neighbor to every other person. The apparent “outsider” must be treated “as if” she or he were within the church.

Within Barth's immediate context this account destabilizes ethnic and religious divisions, and it allows the other to put into question the self's assumptions and patterns about existing social orders. We shall see, however, that while Barth may have been comfortable with destabilizing and relativizing ethnic and religious differences, he was not comfortable with doing the same to sexual difference.

Finally, the neighbor-event demands of the self a ceaseless activity in pursuit of one's neighbor. The benefit conferred through the other imposes on the self the obligation to become play the benefactor to another. While this encounter constitutes the self as necessarily dependent on the conferral of grace through another, it is also demands a constant activity: the subject ought not await the certainty of a divine disclosure through the other before acting, for the veil prevents any self-certainty or assurance other than the assurance of a hope that keeps seeking in the hope of being found and redirected. In Barth's reading of the creation of Adam and Eve, this model of seeking subjectivity becomes paradigmatically masculine: Eve is silent and static, awaiting the initiative of her seeking and electing masculine counterpart, and Barth is clear that it is specifically the masculine subject who, like Adam, is to seek after and find his feminine other.

In this chapter, I have made explicit the subversive dynamics of Barth's construal of the neighbor, when read within in its immediate discursive context. These subversive features, by their very subtlety, lend support to the criticisms that Barth's opposition to the antisemitism of the German church and state in the 1930s was far too restrained. My intent, in foregrounding them, has not been to defend Barth against these critiques but rather to make explicit the critical potential of this depiction of the neighbor, specifically as it can be put to work in unsettling and reconfiguring the boundaries of socio-cultural and theological frameworks. Barth calls for a theological practice in which the self does not await its recognition of the other, but proceeds as

if that recognition had taken place, and in the hope that it will take place. It is therefore a practice that must proceed even when recognition of another continually fails, and especially when the other remains unintelligible and unaddressable to the self. Barth's account of the neighbor in §18 pushes at the limits of contemporary theological frameworks, renegotiating the boundaries that exclude the Jewish other. I will exploit this critical potential in my subsequent chapters in order to unsettle the androcentric and heteronormative framework of Barth's account of sexual difference.⁶⁰

While Barth's §18 construal of the neighbor as mirror and sign has this positive critical potential, it also has the negative potential to lend itself to precisely the sort of abstractions for which Barth's doctrine of Israel has been criticized.⁶¹ Barth has been criticized for producing a

⁶⁰ Judith Butler's Foucauldian model of critique will be especially helpful to me in the following chapters, particularly as presented in *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), and in Talal Asad, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, et al., *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

⁶¹ Barth's doctrine of Israel has been subject to much criticism, especially its supersessionism. Sonderegger, for example, argues that Barth's interpretation of Judaism reproduces in its own distinctive way the language and logic of classic Christian descriptions of Israel and the Jews, thus representing, preserving and elaborating a broad tradition of Christian anti-Judaism, the standard in Christian apologetics since Justin Martyr. Barth allows Judaism no separate identity as a religion, no independent existence or reality or separate identity from the Church; Israel and the Church belong together in one community of God, two forms of one body (*That Jesus Christ was born a Jew*, 6-12). Mark Lindsay recognizes Sonderegger's criticism that Barth grants no lasting legitimacy to Judaism as an independent religious system; his focuses is, however, on the positive role that Judaism plays in *Church Dogmatics* in its dialectical relationship to the Church, in that each requires the witness of the other (*Barth, Israel, and Jesus*, 110). He addresses specifically Barth's silence in *Church Dogmatics* on the Holocaust and the State of Israel, and his book seeks for ways in which Barth's theology addresses the horrors of the Holocaust in his *Church Dogmatics*. He is disappointed by Barth's lack of material engagement with the Holocaust in his account of radical evil (conspicuous because of Barth's public outspokenness on both issues). He recognizes and argues that this silence is not due to theological indifference on Barth's part but has everything to do with Barth's opposition to "natural theology" (in this case understood as reading revelation off historical events like the Holocaust and the rise of the State of Israel). He asks whether this rejection ultimately disempowers Barth from contributing to the relation between theology and politics in wake of Holocaust (and he has here in mind many Jewish thinkers in contemporary Jewish theology who have radically incorporated the Holocaust into theological discourse, as a fundamental determinative historical event, thereby giving Auschwitz revelatory status [see ch. 3, esp. 43]). He argues that Barth's late dogmatic theology gives to Israel a more prominent role than it holds in the pre-Holocaust first half of *CD*, noting his willingness to allow that the 1948 independence of Israel might be a matter of divine providence (110). On the whole this book defends Barth against what the author describes as the almost universal conclusion among sympathetic and unsympathetic critics alike that Barth's theology is irrevocably damaged by a visceral antipathy toward Jews (25). Where Lindsay attributes Barth's reticence on the Holocaust and the State of Israel to his rejection of natural theology, Eugene Rogers, drawing on Marquardt, notes that Barth reintroduces natural theology in key points of his treatment of the history of the Jews insofar as he offers their history as an empirically

doctrine of Israel in which the Jew is constructed as a mirror that *effaces* the will and agency of actual individuals.⁶² In view of this criticism, Barth's construal of the neighbor as mirror to the self must be carefully analyzed, especially as Barth puts it to work in different ways throughout *Church Dogmatics*. In §18, the neighbor's sacramental function is revelatory, and so it has its efficacy through a divine act. As a revelatory medium the neighbor is the veil that unveils the humanity of Christ. In this function the mirror both reflects the self and conceals the other. Yet the neighbor functions as a mirror regardless of the specific nature of his or her activity, and regardless of his or her own self-awareness and opinion of or activities toward the one who gains the benefit. At the same time, it is specifically the activity and will of the neighbor that reflects the self, and this reflection destabilizes and de-centers the self. The self recognizes the futility of his or her own activity in the activity of the other, and this recognition exposes the self's illusions of autonomy, superiority and self-sufficiency. It reveals the self's shared fellowship with and dependency on the neighbor and on Christ. At the same time, the obscurity of the other demands from the self a ceaseless activity of assistance to the other, for the self cannot know if the other sees his or her reflection in the self's own activity.

As we shall see in the following chapters, the feminine other functions as a neighbor and mirror to the masculine-self, but it is not through her activity that she does so. Furthermore, she will be required to follow after the masculine activity that initiates, leads and inspires her. Here

observable representation of the predicament of humanity and attributes their survival as an empirical proof of God's existence and human pride. Here, notes Rogers, he departs from his familiar refusal to accept the empirical reality of history and the self-understanding of groups as proper objects for theological reflection (Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body*, 154-7).

⁶² See Rogers for an insightful application of criticisms of Barth's depiction of Jews to gender. Rogers, together with Sonderegger and Marquardt, voices the concern that "at times, Barth is tempted to reduce the Jews to a cipher, to a mirror that reflects life, but lives none of its own" (qtd. on *ibid.*, 148), a mirror that mediates and reflects the will of another. In Rogers' words: "Despite himself, Barth throws up a conceptual screen onto which he can at once *project* a partial abstraction ('Israel') and *hide* actual human beings ('the Jews') behind it." Rogers argues that the concepts "man" and "woman" are susceptible to a similar critique; they form a conceptual screen (the use of which dates back to Schleiermacher's *Christmas Eve* dialogue) in which two groups of people stand for binary concepts (140-50).

the feminine other functions as a mirror that supports, rather than unsettles, the agency of the masculine subject. The ceaseless activity demanded of the subject in §18 becomes, in *Church Dogmatics* III, a paradigmatically masculine activity that must in some way always precede and preempt the feminine response. The problematic implications of this account for the agency of the feminine subject will be a central concern in my remaining chapters. This account will require a critical correction in which the mirror-reflection functions to unsettle the masculine self and to undermine the agential precedence that Barth lends to it.

CHAPTER TWO

MYTH, MATERNITY, AND SAGA IN BARTH'S DOCTRINE OF CREATION

In this and subsequent chapters I turn to Barth's theological description and agential ordering of sexual difference in the third volume of *Church Dogmatics*, "The Doctrine of Creation." Barth discusses sexual difference in three different locations in this volume. He first broaches the topic in the opening part-volume (III/1). The bulk of III/1 is devoted to a very lengthy exposition of the first two chapters of Genesis, which he uses to orient the reader in his christocentric approach to the doctrine of creation.¹ In III/1, §41 Adam is a model of human agency, who as such is placed in an ordered fellowship with a sexually differentiated human other. The second treatment of sexual difference occurs in the second part-volume (III/2), which contains Barth's theological anthropology. In III/2, §45.3 Barth's figural reading of Genesis 2 provides the biblical template for his depiction of a marital relationship as the fullest realization of human co-existence and fellowship, patterned after Christ's saving fellowship with the Church. The third treatment is found in the fourth part-volume (III/4), which details Barth's special ethics for the doctrine of creation. In III/4, §54.1 Barth makes explicit the ethical features inherent in his earlier two discussions of sexual difference. Sexual difference itself (and with it the relation between the sexes), is the gift of the creator, and as such it imposes a set of obligations that the agent is to perform in obedience to the divine command. Barth's exegetical and figurative reading of the creation of Adam and Eve lays the biblical groundwork for Barth's later efforts to give meaning to sexual difference.

¹ In this chapter, quotations and references to *Church Dogmatics* III/1 are cited in the body of the main text, without reference to volume and part-volume. When referring to other part-volumes, volume number and part-volume number will precede the page number. The first page number refers to the English translation of *Church Dogmatics*. When I refer to the German original, a second page number is positioned after a forward slash. For clarity within the notes, I occasionally used the annotation *KD* when referring to the German text, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, and *CD* when referring to the English translation, *Church Dogmatics*.

Barth construes the relationship between men and women as a sign that points to Christ's redemptive activity, and in so doing he situates the meaning and norm of sexual difference within a strictly christocentric frame of reference. His account continues to refuse any natural theology or any orders of creation framework that would give meaning to sexual difference from resources external to biblical and creedal discourses that refer to God's self-revelation in Christ. Thus he attempts to define sexual difference without depending on contemporaneous philosophical, scientific, or psychological discourses on sexual difference and desire. He does not refer to bodily markers or to reproductive organs and capacities as distinguishing features that lend theological meaning to sexual difference. While Barth no doubt assumes that such physiological markers and capacities are un-ambivalently present, he is silent about their role in distinguishing the sexes. His account of sexual difference is detached from any discussion of sexual reproduction itself. He attempts to resist widely held gender stereotypes even as he preserves assumptions about a distinctively feminine passivity. His account of sexual difference is framed instead in terms of human agency as he understands it: that is, in terms of the seeking, desiring, choosing, and speaking subject that is responsive to divine and creaturely alterity. My intent in the remaining chapters is to open space within his account for configurations of sexual difference and desire that undermine the heteronormative and androcentric restraints of Barth's theological anthropology.

In this chapter and the next, I focus on Barth's reading of Genesis 1-2, for it has a vital role in shaping and supporting his descriptions of sexual difference in III/2 and III/4, to which my final two chapters turn. Throughout I make frequent references to my previous chapter's analysis of the neighbor-benefactor. In I/2, §18 the neighbor is one who exposes the self's need and points to the grace of Christ in meeting that need. In this gratuitous (and divinely enabled)

function the neighbor imposes on the self an obligation to imitate the benefactor and play the neighbor to another. I will argue that this earlier construal of the human other as a revelatory sign retains a central role in Barth's reading of the creation narratives. I will note the precise points at which Barth departs from his earlier account of the agent's encounter with human alterity.

Differences emerge when the human other is the female Eve and not the male ethnically and religiously differentiated Good Samaritan. Assumptions about female passivity and inactivity are implicated in these departures.

Barth's doctrine of creation, and especially his reading of Genesis 1, has been criticized for elevating a masculinist Creator God who stands in antithetical relation to mythological imagery linking maternity and the divine. As will be seen, Barth's dogmatic expositions of his doctrine of creation (§40 and §42), and his exegesis of Genesis 1 (§41), refuse mythologies of all sorts. He puts much effort into distinguishing Genesis 1 from "mythology" as a genre. His rejection of any maternal imagery in his reading of Genesis 1 is deeply implicated in this rejection of myth. This two-sided rejection of myth and maternal imagery is widely recognized as Barth's response to the ideology of National Socialism and its elevation of the relation between maternity, earth, and blood.² This chapter explores the relationship between maternity

² Walter Brueggemann situates Barth's reading of Gen. 1, and especially its masculinist assault on a maternal-fertility Canaanite religion in the socio-political-cultural context of crisis in the 1930s and early 1940s, as an expression of Barth's rejection of the Nazi "blood and soil" religion and its elevation of nature and maternity. Barth inspired Gerhard von Rad and Ernest Wright, and through them the dominant trajectory of Old Testament scholarship that did not meet resistance until the 1970s. Von Rad read the Baal-Yahweh and Canaanite-Israel conflicts through the lens of the German Church struggle, finding an analogue of the Nazi "blood and soil" religion in the Canaanite Baal religion and its fertility-orientation. Following Barth, von Rad and a long line of Old Testament scholars privileged a masculine logic with a macho intrusive God and suppressed feminine-maternal imagery in the texts. Brueggemann describes a paradigm shift in studies of the Old Testament beginning in the 1970s and incorporating feminist concerns in its resistance of this interpretive trajectory. Over against the much used dichotomy between creation and history, this new paradigm viewed creation and history in relation to each other, with a Yahweh who participates in functions otherwise attributed to Baal, and it resisted also the picture of a macho intrusive God with a the picture of a Yahweh who does not exercise complete mastery over resilient and unyielding chaos. For a concise account of Barth's influence on 20th century Old Testament scholarship and the subsequent critique and rejection of that scholarly trajectory, see Walter Brueggemann, "The Loss and Recovery of Creation in Old Testament Theology," *Theology Today* 53, no.2 (1996), 177-90. For a recent review of debates on

and myth in Barth's doctrine of creation. I situate Barth's critical rejection of myth and its accompanying rejection of maternal imagery within his dogmatic performance of a confession of belief in the Creator. I will show that Barth's view of the maternal body and its fecundity is troubled by unexamined assumptions of a feminine passivity. These assumptions, I argue, contribute to his abjection of maternal imagery from his reading of Genesis 1 and 2. Thus, while the elevation of maternity and mythology in the rhetoric of the German Christian movement and National Socialism is a significant contributor to Barth's abjection of maternal imagery, his own assumptions about maternity also play an important part here. The work this chapter accomplishes in exploring the connection between myth and maternity in III/1, will enable me in the next chapter to expose the points at which Barth's assumptions about a distinctively feminine passivity plague both his view of maternity (that is, his abjection of it) and his view of female agency (represented by Eve).

In developing my argument, this chapter will continue to highlight the stance Barth occupies as he inhabits the perspective of the creed, evokes biblical models for that perspective, and in so doing enacts that pattern of agency he finds appropriate for doing theology. Barth enters the doctrine of creation by evoking the first article of the Apostle's Creed, which he uses to depict his dogmatic reflection as a confession of belief that creation is the work of God. He constructs this profession of faith in God's creative activity as an anticipation of the God's redemptive activity in Christ, confessed in the Creed's second article. He recognizes and professes creation as the sign that conceals and reveals the grace of God embodied and enacted in Christ. In so doing he aspires to be a human witness to this work of Christ, becoming the eye that recognizes this hidden gift in multiple creaturely media, and the mouth that professes

the relation of chaos to creation in biblical studies, theology-science dialogue, and systematic theologies see Eric M. Vail, *Creation and Chaos Talk: Charting a Way Forward* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012).

gratitude. In the next chapter I will argue that Barth construes Adam as a biblical model of this grateful agent (eye and voice), one who depends on the benefits of the creaturely world at many levels and is in turn responsible to serve and care for this world. In his responsiveness to and responsibility for creation, Adam becomes a sign of Christ to creation. Eve does not.

In both chapters, then, I will highlight a set of themes I found to be central to Barth's resistance of an orders of creation framework for locating the human neighbor in §18. Barth continues to place before the reader signs of God's grace that, in benefiting the recipient, impose an obligation on him or her to imitate that benefit.³ The recipient is to be redirected out of self-love and self-service in humbled dependence on and responsibility for a network of creaturely entities and actors.⁴ By attending continually to the self-involving character and performative

³ As in the previous chapter I will foreground the revelatory dimensions at play in Barth's depiction of the self's relation to the other. Creaturely media are divinely selected and momentarily enabled to do what they cannot do in their own capacity: disclose God's being, character, and good-will by pointing to the life, person, and work of Christ. As I claimed in my previous chapter, Barth frequently presents this revelatory medium as both bestowing a gift and imposing an obligation. These are all features I will highlight in Barth's doctrine of creation, where creation is construed as a benefit that must be accepted and confessed in faith: the benefit of the existence (of the cosmos and our place within it) must be recognized as God's good gift (in spite of all the ambiguity that confronts us in that cosmos), and confessed as such (in obedience to the obligation that it imposes). Barth articulates this most clearly in §42. I exposed this gospel/law dialectic at work in the neighbor of I/2, §18. He finds this dialectic to be operative in the language of scripture and creed, for the pattern of thought at work here is central to Barth's doctrine of revelation and the knowability of God. For a concise discussion of the sacramental themes in Barth's doctrine of revelation, see Cornelis van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror: John Calvin and Karl Barth on Knowing God: A Diptych*, trans. Donald Mader (Leiden, Brill, 2005), 251-412, esp. 271-4. Kooi picks up on various themes of sacramentality. As Kooi notes a key distinction is always to be maintained between the revealed God and the medium through which God reveals, and this distinction is maintained even with respect to the humanity of Christ—who is the one creaturely medium that is continually efficacious in its revelatory capacity, whereas all other media require repeated acts on the part of God, to become sacramental signs of this paradigmatic sacrament. To recognize Christ's sacramental efficacy however, requires the Spirit's work.

⁴ In the process of making this argument, this chapter and the next will expose resources in Barth's theology of creation for a recent trajectory in ecotheology that is invested in sacramental views of and liturgical approaches to creation. At the same time these two chapters will address the question that frequently arises in such scholarship about parallels between Barth's androcentrism and his anthropocentrism in his reading of Genesis 1-2. With few exceptions Barth is widely named as the exemplar of a problematic anthropocentrism that views creation as the mere theater for God's redemptive work among human beings, a view that does not do justice to creation's integrity in itself nor adequately recognize the cosmic dimensions of redemption. Variations of this critique are found in Walter Brueggemann, "The Loss and Recovery of Creation," 177-90; James Gustafson, *Christ and the Moral Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 28-9; Thomas A. Indinopulos, "The Critical Weakness of Creation in Barth's Theology," *Encounter* 33 (1972): 159-69; George H. Kehm, "The New Story: Redemption as Fulfillment of Creation," in *After Nature's Revolt: Eco-Justice and Theology*, ed. Dieter Hessel (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 93; Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 89, esp. ch.

5; Sallie McFague, *The Body of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 233, n 6; Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 190; Paul H. Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology and the Sciences* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1985), 149; Santmire "Toward a Christology of Nature: Claiming the Legacy of Joseph Sittler and Karl Barth," *Dialog* 34 (1995): 270-80, esp. 27; Stephen H. Webb, *On God and Dogs: A Christian Theology of Compassion for Animals* (New York: Oxford U.P., 1998), 132.

Responding to this critical chorus, Willis Jenkins offers a positive reading of Barth as a resource for ecotheology and environmental ethics, and I am here indebted to his extensive review of Barth's eco-critics (*Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* [Oxford, Oxford U.P., 2008], 153-88, see especially 154-5 for his literature review on Barth). Jenkins' book problematizes the widely echoed claim that anthropocentrism itself is the problematic vantage-point that ecotheologies must refuse, as he seeks theological resources for cultivating habits of care and responsibility toward the environment and its inhabitants. I share with Jenkins an interest in the way Barth's anthropocentric theology of creation, as presented in III/1, functions to cultivate responsive practices in an agent that recognizes her or his situatedness in a cosmos that is the special place of God's indwelling. For Jenkins, Barth's Adam is a model of stewardship that works in concert with earth's integrity to bring forth and maintain its goodness (158-69). Barth's nature has moral significance and even theological voice as its phenomena testify to the work of reconciliation by flourishing on the earth. Humans encountered by the Word enter that special place of flourishing, with all its blessings (181-2). Addressed by the Word, humans are summoned to an active ordering and shaping of the world following Christ's work, listening to natural phenomena, and learning to responsively repeat the Creator's affirmation of creation. This account suggests for Jenkins a necessary responsibility for knowing ecological needs and conditions in order to elicit earth's flourishing. In Barth's doctrine, "would-be masters are reformed into loving arborists, performing the environmental service to which they are set by their Redeemer" (182). Jenkins recognizes that Barth sustains an anthropocentric vantage point, but he limits overconfidence and abuses for an agent who must receive creation in mystery and approach it as a gift (182-3). My reading in these two chapters has much in common with Jenkins. However I will add to his contribution by drawing attention to features in Barth's account that resonate with a strong liturgical and sacramental current in ecotheologies. Jenkins turns to Aquinas for a sacramental construal of human relationships to creation, where creatures become for humans the visible signs of the invisible within certain practices that inculcate virtues fit to properly order passions inflamed for creation (115-52). I would add that Barth has something to offer in this respect also. While Barth is always careful to distinguish divine activity from its creaturely medium in the revelatory event, and while he does not allow that creaturely activity itself mediates divine activity, Barth's depiction of creaturely actors as divinely enabled signs pointing to God's gracious activity has purchase for a trajectory of ecotheology that wants to respect the integrity of all aspects of creaturely existence.

A number of Barth's critics share with Jenkins an interest in conceptualizing creation in sacramental and liturgical terms, although like Jenkins they do not appreciate the contribution Barth can make in this respect. Unlike Jenkins they do not recognize the rhetorical strategies Barth uses to cultivate dispositions of dependency, humility, gratitude, and responsibility in relation to the creaturely world. Sallie McFague raises Aquinas as exemplar for a sacramental approach that sees continuity between God and the world, over and against the prophetic approach of a protestant sensibility of which Barth is exemplar. The latter sees only discontinuity between God and the world and is fearful of any visible thing that would claim to be the invisible presence of the divine (McFague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989], 110). She faults Barth for evacuating God's presence from a world rendered as the mere stage for redemption. God is distant rather than ubiquitous in Barth, and McFague wants an account that sees God's presence everywhere ordering the world (McFague, *Life Abundant: Searching for a new Framework* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001], 9-11, 214, 22). Celia Deane-Drummond sets Barth's view of creation-as-theater-for-redemption as the foil for orthodox theologies in which the whole of creation is a work of God intimately bound up with salvation and expressed through a liturgy permeated by non-humans (McFague, *Eco-Theology* [Toronto: Novalis 2008], 57). Paul Santmire finds both in Calvin's view of providence in nature, and Luther's sacramentalism (a God who is "in, with, and under" the world of nature) resources to counter the exclusive focus on the God-human relationship that Barth privileges. Barth's preoccupation with the relationship between God and humanity reduces nature to the mere instrument for this relationship and fails to appreciate nature's intrinsic value. Santmire is not convinced that the material world can be anything more than a symbol, instrument or machine-like resource for Barth. Santmire seeks instead a theology of nature which does not objectify nature and that has a respectful reciprocity between humankind and nature (*Brother Earth: Nature, God, and Ecology in Time of Crisis* [New York: T. Nelson, 1970]; Santmire, "In God's Ecology: A Revisionist Theology of Nature," in *Christian Century*, [December 2000]). In *Ritualizing Nature: Renewing Liturgy*

dimensions of Barth's rhetoric (his construction and performance of a proper mode of subjectivity), I will in subsequent chapters be in a better position to expose the full implications of Barth's account of sexual difference and the subtle ways in which it situates female agency outside the model of restlessly seeking and faithfully professing subjectivity he describes and performs. I will argue that Barth is not able to successfully secure a coherent account of a distinctively female mode of human activity in relation to a male mode. He provides only one coherent model of human agency, and when he attempts to distinguish male and female modes of relating to each other, the male agent retains all the features of his model agent, while the female is distinguished as a truncated and un-performable version of the male.

This chapter has four major sections. The first section situates Barth's argument in relation to its immediate intellectual context, and specifically those scholarly discourses of which he was aware, in order to expose the ways in which his doctrine of creation and its reading of Genesis 1-2 function as implicit critiques of contemporary views. He will evoke philosophical and mythological accounts of creation as the foils to his own dogmatic performance in III/1. I

in a Time of Crisis (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2008), Santmire is especially interested in the liturgical crafting of Christians for communal involvement in God's works with the whole of creation. For Santmire's reflection on his own body of work and Barth's place within it see "Ecology, Justice, Liturgy: A Theological Autobiography," *Dialog* (Sept 2009): 267ff.

In these next two chapters I will present a dogmatist in the continual practice of enacting and constructing models for his reader of a way of viewing and relating to the world that addresses many of the suspicions voiced by these critics. We will see that Barth is interested in a mode of relating to the world that is both responsive to it and responsible for it. He enacts and models a subject that is aware of its dependency on multiple facets of the cosmos, a subject that sees in these facets the gracious gifts of God (that as such are reminders of God's grace revealed in Christ). A reciprocity is in play, in which the human recipient of such gifts must act in turn as a gift and benefactor to the earth, in care and service to a creaturely world, and in the company of creaturely co-workers. Barth is invested in a project that uses scripture and creed to orient and shape a reader who will recognize in the creaturely world signs of God's care and the obligation to care in turn. In this sense all of creation becomes a sacramental arena that speaks of God's grace, concealing and revealing the incarnate Christ and imposing on the human agent the duty to model and imitate the grace and service of Christ. In this chapter I foreground the professing stance Barth occupies as he situates himself in relation to the creed's first article, as the eye that sees God's handiwork in all of creation and the mouth that gratefully gives witness to it. In the next chapter I argue that he constructs the Gen. 2 figure of Adam as a model for this stance and performance.

outline the intellectual and ideological context for his foils and locate the elevation of maternity within that context.

In the second and third sections, I describe the creedal, biblical, and professing vantage point that Barth occupies as he writes his doctrine of creation. This enables me to expose the inseparable relationship he establishes between the doctrine of creation and the doctrine of redemption (and, in the next chapter, between Adam and Christ). He construes mythology-production as the foil to the proper orientation that he aims to exemplify as he develops his doctrine of creation. I foreground the strategies that Barth uses to direct his readers away from myths and philosophies and to prepare them instead to find in the creation narratives multiple prefigurations of God's redemptive work in salvation history. These strategies require close attention because Barth relies on his prefigurative christocentric reading of the Genesis creation narratives in order to give sexual difference a central place in his theological anthropology without appealing to a natural theology that separates God's revelation in creation (and its "orders") from God's revelation in Christ. To separate the anthropological significance of Adam and Eve in Genesis 1-2 from the life and work of Christ would be to succumb to a natural theology, an orders of creation framework that relies on sources other than God's revelation in Christ. In future chapters I will question Barth's success in this endeavor, for as we shall see, he asserts the centrality of sexual difference and the marital relationship (through an appeal to Gen. 1-2) by effacing the sexual specificity of Christ (his sexed identity, his celibate life, his close circle of twelve male disciples); in so doing he detaches his account of sexual difference from its christological moorings and thus succumbs to a natural theology.

In the fourth section, I turn to Barth's critical rejection of mythology and maternal imagery in his reading of Genesis 1, and also to his location of humankind's divine likeness in

the relationship between men and women. I foreground the revelational features of this relationship in its function as a sign that points to Christ (the *imago Dei*). In his exegesis of Genesis 1, a general and somewhat benign skeletal account of sexual difference emerges in relational and agential terms, and subtly detached from biological reproduction. Barth's effacement of maternal imagery supports this detachment. In my next chapter I turn to Barth's reading of Genesis 2, which he uses to flesh out this account of sexual difference and its connection to the human being's divine likeness.

REJECTING MYTH

Barth devotes considerable space (some 130 pages) to his analysis of Genesis 1-2. A brief survey of several strands of discourse in his intellectual and political context helps to account for the extensive interest he took in these narratives and also to expose the implicit critical function his exegesis serves in relation to this context. Barth was writing during a period of great interest in ancient mythologies. He was indebted to and critical of several hermeneutical trajectories (historical-critical, romantic and idealist) in which myth was a recurring technical category for assessing the religious and applicative significance of biblical narratives that had heavily supernaturalist features (the creation narratives and the gospels in particular). At the same time Barth's exegetical rejection of maternal imagery responds to heightened rhetoric surrounding the maternal function of female identity, while his ordering of sexual difference signals his dismissal of feminist interests in egalitarian configurations. In this section I briefly outline the place of myth, maternity, and sexual difference in some of the rhetorical and intellectual trajectories to which Barth was responding.

Over the previous two centuries myth had developed as an analytical category in hermeneutics for providing a credible proposal for bridging the gap between the literal meaning of biblical narratives and their applicative meaning or religious significance. It showed how narratives like Genesis and the miracle stories in the gospels (which had history-like features) might have abiding religious meaning even when there could be no ostensive historical reference.⁵ As a category, “myth” enabled scholars to empathetically access the literal and grammatical sense of the text by engaging it as an expression of the sensuous, childlike consciousness of a primitive mind. This approach removed the need for scholars to address the

⁵ In *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1974), Hans Frei narrates the gradual breakup of the cohesion between the literal meaning of biblical narratives and their reference to actual events in the 17th century Germany and England. In this gradual detachment of a “real” historical world from its biblical description, the “real” events of history come to constitute an autonomous temporal framework of their own, and biblical narratives, hitherto indispensable means of access to these events, now simply verified them (or failed to do so), thereby affirming the autonomy of that “real” world of history. Frei follows this emergence of a logical distinction between biblical stories and the reality they depict. With it came the collapse of figural interpretation, which prior to the modern period functioned to unify the canon, by weaving the different stories into one common narrative which embraced and incorporated the world of the reader/interpreter. In the pre-critical period figural readings extended the literal readings of particular stories to the whole story of the canon that contained them. But now the figural reading came to be seen in opposition to the literal sense: now the verbal/literal sense was equated with the logical and grammatical sense of the text (i.e. literal meaning came to refer to the singular meaning of the grammatically and logically sound propositional statement, and entailed an investigation of verbal meaning often focused on single words in addition to full statements). The consequence of this transition was an inability on the part of scholars to distinguish the history-likeness of the literal meaning of narratives like Genesis 1-3 from history understood in terms of ostensive reference. The question of the stories’ historical verifiability and reliability came to dominate scholarship invested in reconstructing the events that were recounted (see Frei, 1-13 for the summary of the interpretive trajectory that the entire book traces in detail). Influenced by Frei, David Ford (*Barth and God’s Story* [Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Petr Lang, 1985] 6-13, 17-24, 34-40, esp. 49-52) finds in Barth’s reading of biblical narratives an exception to Frei’s modern trajectory and a recovery of a figural reading of narratives lost to the modern period. In practice, Ford notes, Barth does not share with many of his contemporaries and predecessors a concern with verifying the events of biblical narratives by referring them to what historical critics can reconstruct. He does, however have an alternative external reference to the text, and that is the resurrected Christ who is not only a character in the gospel narratives (and prefigured in Old Testament narratives) but a living person. These gospel stories are able to depict this person’s identity through their history-likeness, and not through their confirmation as *Historie*. The unity of the Bible is held together by the character of Jesus and the plot of his life, and his story extends to embrace not only the Old Testament but also the rest of history. Barth is thus not troubled by the question of whether biblical narratives actually happened. He never denies that these narratives refer to historical events, but he does deny that critical investigation of the events must be coordinated with exegesis of the biblical narratives in order to arrive at the narrative’s meaning. Barth finds no systematic relation between the meaning of the text and the meaning of an account of events reconstructed by an historian. Barth overcomes the hermeneutical gap between text and historical world by asking the reader to realize that the narrated story is her or his own real world and that she or he must find a place within that world in relation to its central character (ibid., 51-2).

burdensome question of its ostensive reference to historical events.⁶ Since the nineteenth-century much scholarship had compared newly discovered Assyrian and Babylonian myths to the biblical creation myths, and by the end of the First World War, this extra-biblical material was front and center in studies of Genesis, and comparative analysis of these texts were of great interest.⁷

Barth's exegesis of Genesis 1-2 makes frequent use of scholarship invested in this comparative mythology (Gunkel in particular), but he puts considerable effort into disentangling Genesis 1-2 from the category of myth and setting it in a figural relationship to the history of God's saving work, narrated in the biblical stories of Israel and the life of Jesus. In detaching Genesis 1-2 from the genre of myth and designating it "saga" instead, Barth locates myth as a bedfellow to the sort of philosophical anthropologies he consistently rejects. If dogmatics finds its foil in philosophical anthropologies and natural theologies, then biblical saga finds its foil in myth. We will see shortly that Barth presents biblical sagas as themselves a subtle critique and rejection of competing mythical worldviews. In doing so Barth secures another biblical model (and vantage point) to support his own critical positioning in relation to competing anthropologies and natural theologies. Whatever sexual difference is for Barth, he will set it also in a critical relationship to

⁶ The development of myth as a critical interpretive category is described in Hans Frei, *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, see esp. 15-23, 183-201, 233-81. For an account of the role empathy played for 18th and 19th century interpreters of mythological texts see 233-45, 268. Barth's self-involving way of reading the Genesis narratives, his efforts to engage and inhabit the vantage point of the narrative from which the story is told, stands in continuity with the function of empathy in hermeneutics of this period that Frei describes. With the aspiration of understanding the author better than s/he understood him or herself, the interpreter sought to empathetically access the primitive consciousness of the author and his or her era as the first step of the interpretive process.

⁷ Gunnlaugur A. Jónsson, *The Image of God: Genesis 1:26-28 in a Century of Old Testament Research*, trans. Lorraine Svendsen (Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1988) 19-21, 58. The Babylonian creation poem *Enuma Elish* was available to scholars for study in 1876, and two of the commentators that Barth used in his exegesis of Genesis 1-2 made frequent reference to it. Hermann Gunkel and Franz Delitzsch were both very interested in *Enuma Elish* and in determining the nature of the dependency of Old Testament texts on Babylonian-Assyrian culture (see Jónsson, 15-32, 44-54). Barth echoes this interest when he assumes the familiarity of the author of Genesis 1 with this cultural context, but he works to detach Genesis 1 from that mythic and cultural context by positioning Genesis 1 as a critical rejection of Babylonian-Assyrian mythology and gods. For a description of Barth's critical use of Delitzsch and Gunkel see K.E Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram: How Augustine, Calvin, and Barth Read the 'Plain Sense' of Genesis 1-3* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 203-5.

past and contemporary constructions (mythical, philosophical, romantic, scientific) that look outside a Christocentric discourse in order to give it meaning. Barth will lend meaning to sexual difference by locating it in a network of scriptural signs and figures that stand together in their prefigurative and analogical relation to Christ, the master sign.

Regarding Barth's configuration of sexual difference itself, he structures sexual difference as the irreducible and un-equalizing divider of humankind, and in doing so he resists two movements: 1) feminism's push for greater equality before the law (within Germany and Switzerland) and the relativizing of differences between the sexes that this push entails; 2) the conflation of femininity with maternity in the rhetoric of the German Christian Movement and National Socialist ideology.

Having left Germany in 1935, Barth wrote this part-volume in Switzerland at a time when the Second World War had put feminist emancipatory efforts on hold. While in Germany, he had witnessed conservative forces successfully resist and undo the successes gained by the German Women's Movement since the early days of the Weimar Republic.⁸ These reversals had

⁸ While women in Switzerland were not enfranchised until 1971, Weimar had given women the right to vote in 1918 and its constitution included sexual equality as a basic right (Suzanne Selinger, *Charlotte von Kirschbaum and Karl Barth: A Study in Biography and the History of Theology* [University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State U.P.] 31). On the gains made by feminist groups in Germany during the First World War and the gradual recognition by nationalist men of the inevitable inclusion of women in the public sphere and their efforts to mobilize women's organizations for nationalist ends, especially toward the end of the War, see Matthew Stibbe, "Anti-Feminism, Nationalism and the German Right, 1914–1920: A Reappraisal," *German History* (June 2002): 185–210. Stibbe notes the recasting of traditional gender stereotypes around war time realities between 1914 and 1918. Male dominance came to be articulated in military terms with the male figure exemplified in the soldier and hero. The male sphere shifted to the war front and the female sphere to the home front. As the war progressed and women were needed in traditionally male occupations, they came to acquire new public identities. Conservative anti-feminist forces now recognized the need for women's roles outside the domestic sphere and the need to reach out to women to maintain morale at home as the war continued. During this time, especially as morale waned, such groups remained hostile to the feminist movement, equating all forms of women's public activism with the small radical minority of pacifist feminists who opposed the war front. The women's movement was perceived as part of the "defeatist" forces at home that were weakening national resolve. The military thus worked with women's organizations to spread propaganda at home, with the aim of lifting the spirits of the home front. Selinger notes that in response to the wartime loss of life, the declining birthrate, and the unsettling of traditional gender spheres, the political right exploited a century long fascination with "the feminine" as it reasserted separate spheres for men and women. The domestic sphere allotted to women was later summarized in the Nazi slogan "Kinder, Küche, Kirche", and was to be protected from the male sphere of work, war and state (*Charlotte von Kirschbaum*, 93). Barth will

been accompanied by a hyper-masculine rhetoric and the alignment of femininity with maternity.⁹ During the Weimar period the efforts of the German Women's Movement accompanied a rapid rise of women in the work force, ongoing since the late nineteenth-century and increasing after the First World War. Their labor, primarily in factories and offices, was seen by many, including theologians, as allowable for unmarried woman in need of a livelihood, but only as a temporary stage between schooling and the marriage that would give women access to their "proper role" as mothers in the domestic sphere. However only one in five industrial workers got married, as the normality of marriage itself was challenged in Germany and throughout the Western world after the War. This reality provoked an increasingly vocal conservative push for the restoration of women to their place of domesticity in a male dominated world, where the task of raising children was an urgent one, due to wartime losses and a birthrate in decline since the mid-nineteenth century. Within this context feminism was viewed by many

have been aware of this rhetoric, having lived in Germany during the first War and not departing until 1935. In Switzerland, women's organizations, active since the mid-nineteenth century, had been striving for equal access to higher education, compensation and job opportunities, and prior to the Second World War they been pushing for women's suffrage. It was widely accepted that the sexes differed in nature and each had its appropriate sphere of responsibility (family life for women and public life for men). The few feminists that contradicted this consensus were alienated by advocates of women's suffrage. Egalitarian interpreters of sexual difference argued that women's responsibility to family did not exclude them from their commitment to the public sphere, nor would their involvement in the latter sphere compromise their place at the heart of the former. Opponents to women's suffrage argued that the complementary separation of private and public life would be further undermined if women continued their movement into the public sphere, adding suffrage to their access to paid work and education. For both supporters and opponents of women's suffrage, motherhood represented a profound difference between the sexes: opponents argued that it established a status of dependence that was incompatible with the notion of a free and independent voter, while supporters of suffrage argued that women's responsibility for children enhanced their insight into social affairs (Regina Wecker, "The Oldest Democracy and Women's Suffrage: The History of a Swiss Paradox, in *25 Years of Emancipation? Women in Switzerland 1971-1996*, ed. Joy Charnley, et al. (Berne, Peter Lang, 1998), 25-40, esp. 35-7; Brigitte Studer, "The Rise of 'Public Woman': Politics, Citizenship and Gender in the Swiss Debate on Female Suffrage after World War Two," in *Ibid.*, 41-56.

⁹ See Selinger, *Charlotte von Kirschbaum*, 92-100 for a helpful account of the feminine stereotypes circulating in the 1920s and 1930s.

as a threat, and it provoked exaggerated defenses of a traditional patriarchal ordering of the family.¹⁰

The Lutheran doctrine of the orders of creation, which I discussed in my previous chapter, provided an influential framework (especially in the 1920s and 1930s) for resisting feminism and aligning feminine difference with maternity. Older nineteenth-century views of the natural character of the female sex and its appropriate social role were recast with motherhood as the primary identity, role, and vocation for women, and the psychic appropriateness of women for this role was cast as secondary and symptomatic of their proper place in the orders of creation. The repression of feminist emancipatory efforts in the 1920s and 1930s was also accompanied by the repression of Jewish emancipatory efforts to attain equality without distinction, as both emancipatory movements were cast as a threat to society and morality.¹¹ As I noted in my previous chapter, the orders of creation framework was put to the

¹⁰ Sheila Briggs, "Images of Women and Jews in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century German Theology," in *Immaculate & Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*, ed. Clarissa W. Atkinson, et al. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 240-9; Suzanne Selinger, *Charlotte von Kirschbaum*, 31. That there was an essential difference between men and women was an unquestioned assumption at the rise of German feminism in the mid-19th century, and it remained so for many feminists in the early 20th century. Women were viewed as different from men, and many in the women's movement feared the more radical activists who undermined sexual difference in efforts to imitate men. However there was much disagreement about what this difference entailed. Were women more susceptible to sin, more moral than men, naturally unreliable? The issue for feminists was how this difference was to be framed in terms of equality and dignity. Many feminists argued that woman's dignity was inextricable from her value as a complementary partner to man. Most feminists and female political activists in Germany and Switzerland linked demands for greater equality before the law and efforts to expand women's activity beyond the domestic sphere with their concern to retain women's femininity and difference from men. Calls for emancipation were embedded in the glorification of marital partnership and of women's special difference from men. But delight in women's difference at times slid into negative representations of female nature. Much feminist activity was directed toward acquiring equal status before the law and expanded access to higher education, job training, career-access, and activities within the church (the right to vote and hold office on congregational governing boards, for example). In Germany, feminist activity was suppressed with the Nazi rise to power and its restriction of women to the domestic sphere. See Wecker, "The Oldest Democracy and Women's Suffrage", 25-40; Dagmar Herzog, *Intimacy & Exclusion: Religious Politics in Pre-Revolutionary Baden* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1996), 88, 140; Catherine M. Prelinger, "Religious Dissent, Women's Rights, and the Hamburger Hochschule fuer das weibliche Geschlecht in mid-nineteenth-century Germany," *Church History* (March 1976): 42-55; Marion A. Kaplan, "German-Jewish Feminism in the Twentieth Century," *Jewish Social Studies* (January 1976): 39-53.

¹¹ See Sheila Briggs, "Images of Women and Jews," 226-59, esp. 246-9. For example, in the 1920s, theologian Reinhold Seeberg depicted Judaism and feminism as encroachments of materialistic individualism on a public realm that must remain exclusively male, Christian, and Germanic. The push for women's equality led to the degradation

service of this conservative agenda by recasting ethnic identity (i.e. Jews versus Aryans) as an irreducible difference and divider that paralleled the far-less-questioned view of an irreducible sexual difference. However, whereas maternal femininity was granted an important place within the Volk, the Jewish other was cast outside the Volk as its primary corrupting threat.¹²

The ostracizing of the Jewish other and the reduction of femininity to maternity were, of course, widespread cultural constructions during this time, expanding well beyond discussions of the orders of creation. In the 1920s and 1930s many looked beyond Christianity for resources that would buttress the rising nationalism and its reconfiguration of Jewish and feminine alterity. This period's heightened interest in mythology and prehistory found one strand of expression in popular scholarly publications on prehistoric matriarchies. Cynthia Eller has documented the interest some German scholars of this period had in a theory of societal evolution (based on a study of ancient myth, ritual, and religion), in which a matriarchal Goddess-worshipping society preceded a patriarchal society where male gods dominated. At a time when antisemitic distaste for the Old Testament fueled interest in alternate myths of origin, a number of scholars, including some members of the Third Reich, took a keen interest in this theory of a matriarchal

of woman herself, the collapse of marriage, the destruction of the procreative familial base of German Volk, and the spread of sexual disease. He linked the Jewish character with female stereotypes. He praised National Socialism for putting society on the path to patriarchal health, in which women and Jews, sharing similar character traits, were no longer in the wrong place. Marriage was once more recognized as the natural goal of a woman who, if she must work, should choose a profession proper to her female nature (248-52). Paul Althaus, on the theology faculty at Erlangen, addressed the woman question in terms of motherly identity and vocation, although he did not confine motherhood (understood in terms of sympathy and sacrifice) to the domestic sphere, for the Volk needed women in professional, public, and political spheres (246-7).

¹² Ibid., 247. See the discussion of gender dynamics in the German Christian Movement in Doris L. Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 61-81, 119-141, 182-205. For her account of the intersection of gender and race in the rhetoric of German Christians see especially 68-9 and 82-100. Bergen documents the ways in which German Christians used sexual difference as an analogue for racial differences. They frequently argued that Christian faith no more eradicated the "biological fact" of race than it did physical differences between male and female. The analogy from race to gender was used to justify exclusion of Aryans from pastoral office. As Paul forbade women to speak in church, so German Protestants were justified in forbidding Jews to speak in German congregations. The gap between the invisible universal church and the visible church where race and gender remained instantiated was used by German Christians to legitimize its exclusion of non-Aryans. Scriptures that might suggest the effacement of such differences were attributed to the universal church and used to support the givenness of these differences in the visible church. I address this in my previous chapter.

prehistoric society, and some hoped the mythic and symbolic expressions of such societies might play a role in establishing a new Aryan religion. Eller describes this politically conservative strain of scholarship and its myth of a matriarchal prehistory, a myth that became popular in the early decades of the twentieth-century German speaking intellectual world. A group of scholars rehabilitated an 1861 work by Johann Jakob Bachofen and used it to provide the groundwork for a fascist understanding of myth and symbol in Germany. They produced a number of popular publications that served a conservative, regressive, and fascist political agenda. These publications solidified the contemporary equation of femininity, maternity, and earth and aligned it with the agenda of the Third Reich. Within this literature, maternity and matriarchy were idealized not as something to return to, but rather lamented with a sense of nostalgic loss under the reigning masculine virility of the current culture. Eller argues that this matriarchal narrative served as a basis for both nostalgia and hope. It was a tacit idealizing of German womanhood, and especially motherhood, that confined it to a narrow perfection that could only work if balanced by the complementary and usually greater perfection of manhood. Woman in her function as mother symbolized core values in need of retrieval to correct an over-emphasis on male virility and intellect. The monotheistic and paternalistic faith of the Jews was faulted by many for destroying the privileged place the mother and her close relationship to blood, earth, and instinct occupied in society.¹³

As I noted above, scholars have recognized in Barth's reading of Genesis 1 a critical rejection of Nazi ideology's mythological interest in associations between earth and maternity. Barth's research assistant, Charlotte von Kirschbaum, had Bachofen's work on matriarchal prehistory on her horizons during this period, as she pursued her own work on the role of women

¹³ Cynthia Eller, "Matriarchy and the Volk," *JAAR* 81 no.1 (March 2013): 188-221.

within the church.¹⁴ Given her indispensable role in keeping Barth apace with scholarly trends, this line of scholarship would likely have been known by Barth. He also relied on the commentaries of scholars like Gunkel who sought the residue of matriarchal mythologies in the Genesis creation narratives. Barth's consistent rejection of maternal imagery in his reading of the creation stories coincides with his efforts to situate the creation sagas in critical relationship to myth. Against a backdrop in which female identity and maternity are so closely connected, Barth's rejection of any positive incorporation of maternal imagery into the Genesis creation sagas is as striking as his silence on the relation of maternity to female identity. At the same time, Barth's very lengthy exegesis of a Jewish story of origins can be read as his own act of resistance to a climate that was averse to Jewish scriptures but intensely interested in myths of origin. Within this climate his exegesis of Genesis 1-2 is Barth's own telling of a counter story of origins, performed as an obedient and faithful hearing and professing response that witnesses to the Word in the human words of creedal and biblical voices. I will draw attention to features of this performance shortly.

While in this context ethnic difference was frequently cast as analogous to sexual difference, Barth sought to unsettle and relativize the former while retaining the latter. I argued in Chapter 1 that Barth's exposition of the parable of the Good Samaritan subtly subverts the antisemitic rhetoric of ethnic difference. We will see that in his reading of Genesis 1 he continues to refuse any reification of ethnic difference as a structural divider of humankind. Sexual difference is the one structural difference on which Barth will insist, but its function as such is detached from sexual reproduction. In my next chapter I will argue that the revelatory and christological features of the "neighbor," which Barth uses to unsettle ethnic differences in

¹⁴ Von Kirschbaum's correspondence with feminist Henriette Visser't Hooft Boddaert includes a discussion in the 1940s of images of men and women offered by mythologies, and Bachofen is mentioned (Selinger, *Charlotte von Kirschbaum*, 75).

§18, remain in play in his account of sexual difference and can be used to unsettle that account in the same way that it unsettles ethnic difference. I will thus tease out the implications that his rejection the orders of creation has for his hierarchy of sexual difference.

In making this argument I am suggesting an alternative egalitarian approach to sexual difference that was available to Barth, but one he declined to take. Barth was pushed by at least one feminist contemporary to consider the significance of his rejection of the orders of creation (and the antisemitism it supported) for theological efforts to subordinate women to men. Barth and his research assistant, Charlotte von Kirschbaum, were engaged in an exchange with Henriette Visser't Hooft Boddaert, the wife of an ecumenical leader and friend of Barth. She was eager to use the progressive aspects of Barth's theology to push him toward more egalitarian views of the relation between the sexes. In a letter in May 1934 Visser't Hooft Boddaert faulted Barth for not seeing the connection between the subordination of women, the orders of creation, and the rise of Nazi-ideology, and she suggested that the traditional acceptance of male domination was a contributor to the current crisis in Germany.¹⁵ While Barth was dismissive in

¹⁵ See Selinger, *Charlotte von Kirschbaum*, 21, fn. 84. Henriette Visser't Hooft Boddaert's letter is published in *Eva, wo bist du? Frauen in internationalen Organisationen der Ökumene: eine Dokumentation*, ed. Gudrun Kaper, Henriette Visser't Hooft, et al. (Gelnhausen: Burckhardthaus-Laetere Verlag, 1981), 17-19. Her exchanges with Barth are described in Hannelore Erhart and Leonore Siegele-Wenschkewitz, "Vierfache Stufenleiter abwärts...: Gott, Christus, er Mann, das Weib': Karl Barth und die Solidarität und Kritik von Henriette Visser't Hooft," in *Wie Theologen Frauen sehen—von der Macht der Bilder*, ed. Renate Jost and Ursula Kubera (Freiburg: Herder, 1993), 142-58, and also in Jürgen Moltmann, "Henriette Visser't Hooft," in *Gotteslehrerinnen*, ed. Luise Schottroff and Johannes Thiele (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1989), 169-79. Visser't Hooft Boddaert was a Dutchwoman educated at a Quaker school in England and she moved in ecumenical circles in Geneva (Selinger, *Charlotte von Kirschbaum*, 71). She also published an article in 1934 (Henriette Visser't Hooft, "Is there a Woman's Problem?" *The Student World* 27 [1934], 12-15) that protested the domination-submission arrangement of I Cor. 11:5-9 (an important text for Barth) and related texts, arguing instead for an egalitarian Christian ethic based on mutual interest, trust and responsibility. Barth's response in a private letter was to argue that the Bible assumed a patriarchal ethic, that the New Testament assumed the superiority of Adam because Christ was male, and that without an ethic of female subordination Paul could not articulate the superiority of God over humanity. Fourteen years later, in 1948 Barth was at the World Council of Churches assembly in Amsterdam, where a number of women (among them Visser't Hooft Boddaert, Sarah Chakko, Madeleine Barot, and Cornelia van Asch van Wyck) asserted the need for ecumenical Christianity to recognize the equal rights of women in church and society. Emphasizing Gal. 3:28, they criticized Barth for his use of Pauline teachings to advance a subordinationist ordering of the relation between the sexes, which, they argued, undermined his affirmation of women in his exegesis of Genesis 1-2 in III/1. Barth insisted on the relativity of Galatians 3:28 among biblical texts on sexual difference but was unable to convince

his response to Visser't Hooft Boddaert, von Kirschbaum engaged in a more productive exchange with her over several years, beginning in 1935. As Suzanne Selinger has shown, von Kirschbaum shared and at points influenced Barth's position on sexual difference and the subordinate role of women.¹⁶ In her own independent research on women in Scripture, church

them with his arguments. For accounts of the exchange between Barth and Visser't Hooft Boddaert, and of his interactions with the women involved in the WCC see: Gary Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology*, 165-6, 227 fn. 122, 123; Donald W. Norwood, *Reforming Rome: Karl Barth and Vatican II* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 152-6; Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1976), 358; M. Kurian, *Sarah Chakko: A Voice of Women in the Ecumenical Movement* (Thiruvalla, India: Christhava, 1998), 99. Dorrien suggests that the criticisms of these women resulted in Barth's more serious grappling with his ethics of sexual difference in III/4 (published in 1951), where he dropped the patronizing rhetoric of his earlier responses to egalitarian arguments, while continuing to insist that women are secondary in a sequential ordering. Selinger also notes a positive shift in Barth's view of women: from the early 1930s onwards (as he came to increasingly depend on von Kirschbaum) Barth seemed more open to recognizing women as equal in value to men and of greater value than he had hitherto recognized. Selinger describes an occasion in 1932 in which Barth came to the defense of a female pastor who lived apart from her husband in order to fulfill her vocation; in response to the view that this decision violated the orders of creation, Barth, (while not championing the opening of the pastorate to women) noted the lack of scriptural clarity on this issue and noted that a similar lack of clarity that was used to defend slavery in the USA (*Charlotte von Kirschbaum*, 107).

¹⁶ Selinger's book is a careful account of the personal and collaborative relationship between von Kirschbaum and Barth, and it compares Barth's account of sexual difference with von Kirschbaum's published essays and letters on the subject, which occupied her interests more extensively than it did Barth's. They met in 1925, and she quickly took Thurneyson's place as the first reader, dialogue partner, and sounding board for Barth's work (*ibid.*, 52-7). They discussed their mutual love in 1926 (81), and after Barth asked for a divorce and his wife, Nelly, refused, Barth moved von Kirschbaum into the family home as his full-time research assistant and secretary in 1929 (59). She occupied this role until the onslaught of a degenerative brain malady in the early 1960s, which first manifested in memory problems and deteriorating mental capacities, and she was eventually relocated to a medical facility where she remained until her death, which followed Barth's own. When she moved into Barth's home in 1929 as full-time assistant she took on secretarial and administrative tasks in addition to work as a researcher, editor, and typist. In Münster and Bonn, and in Basel from 1935 onward they had separate, adjoining studies. Hers was part of her living quarters and was accessible through his study. He attempted to incorporate her into his family (60, 68). Selinger describes the sheer volume of her work. It was a combination of research, taking dictation (for books, articles, lectures, speeches), editing texts that Barth wrote in manuscript form, and typing. She attended his lectures and the lectures of others on his behalf. For example, he had her take his place in attending the lectures of Heinrich Scholz and she pursued issues with him on Barth's behalf. She learned Latin so as to access patristic, medieval, and Reformation sources. Barth relied on her to read widely in current scholarship, books and journals so as to keep him up to date, and to allow him to read selectively and be prepared for surprise attacks. She assembled primary and secondary texts for Barth to review. She maintained a card index of important sources for his lecture preparation that functioned as a reference library of church tradition (60-2). In addition to this, she kept his calendar, scheduled meetings and appointments, orchestrated a very complex schedule, and managed correspondence by sorting and answering much of it based on his instructions and archiving copies (78). Barth did employ student research assistants whose duties overlapped with some of her own, in maintaining the index card file, and proofreading and indexing volumes of *Church Dogmatics* (61). With this extremely heavy work load, she found little time to pursue her own interests in the status of women in the church. However she delivered a lecture series after the second World War that was published in 1949 as *Die wirkliche Frau (The Real Woman)*, her formulation of a Protestant doctrine of women which Barth cites on occasion in *Church Dogmatics* (15).

Selinger's book is a contribution to discussions on the relationship between the two. She wants to resist some of the romantic mythologizing she sees in defensive depictions of a relationship that from the very beginning

history, and theology, she engaged the Women's Movement with a seriousness that Barth did not.¹⁷ Her own descriptions of the relationship between men and women parallel Barth's, and she shares his ordering of the relationship and opposes Visser't Hooft Boddaert's egalitarian

was viewed by Barth's closest friends and beyond as scandalous to his reputation. Selinger notes that some of these accounts attempt to defend the Karl, Charlotte, and Nelly triangle as a God-given thing, painful but somehow a good that exceeds the understanding of critics (40). Selinger views Barth as selfish in exploiting her work and in putting her into a dependent and tense living situation that deprived her of any alternatives once she was committed. Selinger seeks to locate von Kirschbaum's voice and contribution to Barth's work while recognizing the difficulty of untangling her contribution, given the interwoven character of their collaboration (41). Eberhard Busch's *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* is the major source for Barth's biographers, and it addresses Barth's relationship with von Kirschbaum and considers the relationship's intellectual import for Barth's work as well as the enormous tension and pain it provoked within the family. Renate Köbler, *In the Shadow of Karl Barth: Charlotte von Kirschbaum*, trans. Keith Crim (Louisville: John Knox, 1989) is the first freestanding work on von Kirschbaum, and it includes a short biography and interpretive portrait, tribute, two lectures ("Address for the Movement 'Free Germany'" [1945] and "The Role of Women in the Proclamation of the Word" [1951]), and many observations. It is a feminist approach to biographical genre, focused on the work and voices of women who have collaborated with men. Eleanor Jackson's introduction to the translation of von Kirschbaum's lectures on women (*The Question of Woman: The Collected Writings of Charlotte von Kirschbaum*, trans. John Shepherd, ed. with an Introduction by Eleanor Jackson [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996]) asserts what Selinger finds to be unsustainable claims about the extent to which von Kirschbaum contributed to the writing of *Church Dogmatics*, both in generating ideas and helping to write the notes (Selinger, *Charlotte von Kirschbaum*, 39 fn. 151). See *ibid.*, 24, 39-41 for this review of literature on their relationship.

¹⁷ Von Kirschbaum's research complicates the picture of Barth's views on sexual difference. Her role as research assistant has frequently raised the question of the extent to which she contributed to the writing of *Church Dogmatics*. This question is especially significant on the issue of sexual difference, given her own level of investment in the matter, and Barth cites her publications on this issue at certain points, noting his reliance on her work with respect to the relation between men and women. Von Kirschbaum was writing and thinking about the scriptural basis for a theological account of the relation between the sexes well before Barth was, as her correspondence with Visser't Hooft Boddaert indicates (*ibid.*, 70-75). Selinger suggests that while von Kirschbaum's christology and Old Testament exegesis (put to work in this exchange and in her own work on women) benefited from Barth's contemporaneous work on the doctrine of election in II/1 (1940), Barth's revised views of the image of God and its centering on the relation between men and women beginning with III/1 (1945) benefited directly from her work on the ordering and nature of relationship between the sexes, as evident in this correspondence with Visser't Hooft Boddaert. While she does not at this point equate the image with the relationship between the sexes (as she will later in *Die wirkliche Frau*), she has begun to pull together scriptural teachings in both Testaments for a christologically framed account well before Barth does (*ibid.*, 74-5). Von Kirschbaum's writings include "Address for the Movement 'Free Germany'" (1945) and "The Role of Women in the Proclamation of the Word" (1951), and her essays are collected in *The Question of Woman: The Collected Writings of Charlotte von Kirschbaum*. For my immediate purposes, her indispensable role in Barth's work and her research on the nature and role of women help give a sense of the level of exposure Barth had (through von Kirschbaum and in spite of his contempt) to feminist concerns. These concerns were on his horizons, and will help to explain his efforts to assure his readers that his construal of the subordinate status of women means no insult or loss of dignity to women. While I will argue shortly that Barth's dialectical construal resists and perhaps even softens some of the claims he (and von Kirschbaum) make about the subordinate status of women, I do not want to suggest he was anything other than intransigent on this issue. He will want continually to articulate sexual difference in terms of a subordinate agential dependency of the female to male initiative and leadership.

commitments.¹⁸ However, unlike Barth, von Kirschbaum takes an interest in the biblical roles of Mary and Old Testament mother-figures like Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel. She seeks to configure creativity not as a male attribute (as Barth viewed it), but as applicable to women, primarily in the form of a maternal relation to others that she construed in a spiritual sense (rather than in terms of physical maternity).¹⁹ As dismissive as Barth was of feminists and the Women's Movement, the influence and role of von Kirschbaum in his work may account for his efforts to insist that the subordinate status he assigns to women should not be perceived as derogatory or as entailing the tyrannical threat that feminist interlocutors like Visser't Hooft Boddaert clearly viewed it to be.²⁰

¹⁸ Both women were deeply concerned with defining and defending the nature of women both against Protestant religious conservatives and contemporary feminists or "liberationists," whom they feared denied and threatened the realization of differences between men and women. Both read Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxieme Sexe* and were unsatisfied with this option in part because it did not have the Christian framework they desired. But von Kirschbaum did not seek an egalitarian but rather a super-/subordered relation. In their exchange von Kirschbaum centers her work and views of women around I Cor. 11 and presents an account of super-/subordered relations that parallels Barth's own, and as early as Nov 1941 (well before Barth's publication of III/1) she appeals to Genesis 2 to argue that this ordering is evident in the creation of the Adam first in the image of God and Eve as his helper. She argues that each realizes that image of God in a different way, the woman by seeing and responding to her image of God in the man, and he by recognizing in her the helper God intended her to be. Visser't Hooft Boddaert the more radical of the two, is critical of the construal and mistreatment of women both in scripture and history and argues that asserting such an order as given in I Cor. 11, even in a non-fallen world is naively problematic. She faults von Kirschbaum's account for ultimately construing only the man in the image of God (Selinger, *Charlotte von Kirschbaum*, 74-75).

¹⁹ Ibid., 110-5.

²⁰ Ibid., 99-100. Selinger believes that feminism was but "a blip on the corner of Barth's radar screen." Barth is not known for attentive engagement with feminism and feminist egalitarians such as Visser't Hooft Boddaert, and Selinger concludes that Barth never gave the Women's Movement a chance, was annoyed by it from the start, and responded with increasing hostility towards it, dismissing the push for equal rights with men as an effort to transgress the nature and dignity of women, and to suppress the difference he saw to be a positive distinctiveness (32, 99-100). However Selinger's attention to the serious engagement von Kirschbaum gave the movement along with Selinger's depictions of the level of mutual indebtedness each had to the other on the issue of sexual difference, as well as her extensive role in contributing and making possible the writing of *Church Dogmatics*, altogether give us reason to believe that insofar as Barth is aware of and responding to the German Women's Movement and to feminist theological arguments, this response is channeled through the vehicle of von Kirschbaum's own engagement and interest in this arena. His surprisingly charitable discussion of Simone de Beauvoir in CD III/4, 161-2 is explicitly credited to Von Kirschbaum, who engaged it because she saw it to be dangerous because it was partly correct (32). Other critics of Barth's subordinationist account of sexual difference point out in his defense that within his Swiss context Barth was in some ways ahead of his time (Clifford Green, "Liberation Theology? Karl Barth on Women and Men," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 29, no.3&4 (Spring & Summer, 1974), 223; Donald W. Norwood, *Reforming Rome*, 151). Noting that it was not until after his death that

Barth's doctrine of creation enacts a critical rejection of contemporary philosophies and contemporary interests in myths of origin. He depicts Genesis 1 as occupying a parallel critical relationship to mythologies of its own time. In his exposition of the articles of the Creed and biblical narratives, Barth keeps his focus on the divine creating actor, the knowledge of whom is inseparable from the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He sets his own dogmatic activity over and against his by-now-familiar foil of anthropocentric philosophies and theologies. Philosophy and myth are two sides of the same coin, for he construes them both as the idealistic expressions generated by the isolated human subject—a subject whose productions and pursuits are *not* the response to an encounter with the divine subject witnessed to in ecclesial discourse.²¹ Barth aligns his dogmatic witness to the divine activity of creation with a theological tradition he associates with The Didache, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Calvin, Melancthon, Polanus, Quenstedt, and against a philosophically-oriented tradition that he associates with Kant, Dorner, Biedermann, Lipsius, Ritschl, Seeberg, and Troeltsch. The former tradition unlike the latter performs a proper fixation on the divine creating actor of salvation history: “they do not put man and his elevation to humanity into the centre of the quest for the meaning of creation, but God's dealings with man in the history of the covenant” (47). Myth is the imaginative, figurative, poetic, childlike alter-ego to Barth's philosophical foil. Myths are interested in timeless and eternal truths, and when they have history-like features, Barth dismisses these as mere covers for non-historical esoteric

Switzerland granted women the right to vote and that most Reformed churches in Switzerland opened ordination to women, they point to texts where Barth voices his support for the ordination of women (Letter of Eduard Thurneysen to Barth, 21 July 1932 and notes, *Karl Barth-Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel*, Band 3 [Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2000], 244-5), for their full inclusion in Reformed church councils (*Karl Barth Letters 1961-1968*, ed. and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981], 175), and for their full political inclusion in the state (Barth's 1946 work “The Christian Community and the Civil Community,” in *Community, State and Church* [Gloucester MA: Peter Smith, 1968], 175; his lectures delivered in Chicago in 1962, published as *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction* [London: Collins Fontana, 1965], 77). For a brief history of the women's movement in Switzerland see Regina Wecker, “The Oldest Democracy and Women's Suffrage,” 25-40, and Brigitte Studer, “The Rise of ‘Public Woman’” 41-56.

²¹ See III/1, 9 for Barth's pairing of philosophy and myth.

speculations that always point to a timeless truth beyond the features of the story (84-7). Indeed, on Barth's terms, they cannot do otherwise if they do not take as their object the creation of the cosmos by the God revealed in Jesus Christ, and if they do not view creation as the arena that makes possible the saving works of God in the history of Israel and in the life-history of Christ (84-7):

Genuine myth never means a genuinely pre-historical emergence, a beginning of the reality of man and his cosmos in encounter with distinct divine reality....It knows only the one reality of man and his cosmos—their predicates and their inner movement....It understands even God or the gods and divinities only as figure-heads, as personified agents in the economy of this one reality....Never is man more himself and at home in his world, never does he have in his own strength a better understanding of himself and his world, than as an inventor and author or an intelligent hearer and reader of myth.” (85)²²

On Barth's terms, myth is just another self-serving production of the isolated and self-absorbed subject (87).

What myth lacks the biblical creation sagas of Genesis 1-2 seek to exhibit, as do the dogmatics that properly mime the sagas' orientation and focus: “God and His activity, the distinction and confrontation between the Creator and the creature, the liberty of another divine reality which encounters man and his world and sovereignly decrees without reference to them” (86).²³ As confessed by the church and narrated in the opening sagas of Genesis,

²² Myth's fundamental feature is “the contemplation of man and his cosmos as self-moved and self-resting, the contemplation of his emergence as one of his own functions” (85).

²³ See especially his discussion of myth in contrast to biblical “saga” (84-87). He says myth expresses in concrete images an abstract philosophy of origins. Philosophy is thus myth's alter ego whose language can express abstractly what it says concretely. While myth is Barth's primary foil in §§41–42, in §43 he tackles “philosophy”—namely, any worldview that does not circulate around the central figure of Christ, any worldview not articulated from a confessional stance that sees God's gracious activity in Christ reflected in creaturely reality. It is not until he has spent hundreds of pages training the reader to occupy this orientation that he turns to “philosophy,” and to a discussion of a number of philosophers. By now he has prepared his reader to recognize with him the incapacity of philosophy to offer what Christocentric ecclesial discourse does. A reader whose orientation is fixed on the triune subject, in gratitude toward the divine gifting of creaturely reality that everywhere speaks of the grace of God in Christ, will find nothing much to see in any other types of discourse or reflection. Thus in §43.1 he states: “Clearly we are faced at this point by the fundamental difference between the Christian doctrine of creation and every existent or conceivable world-view. The formal difference that the former, as theology, is concerned only with

Creation is not a timeless truth, even though time begins with it, and it extends to all times, and God is the Creator at every point in time. According to Scripture there are no timeless truths, but all truths according to Scripture are specific acts of God in which He unveils Himself; acts which as such have an eternal character embracing all times, but also a concretely temporal character. As Jesus Christ Himself is eternal as God and stands as Lord above all times, but is also concretely temporal and in this way the real Lord of the world and His community, so it is with creation. (60)

I will soon draw attention to the ways in which Barth reads Genesis 1 as a critical rejection of contemporaneous Babylonian and Assyrian myths—a rejection that resembles Barth’s own critical relation to the philosophies and mythologies of his day (89, 92). These biblical sagas narrate the first acts of the divine protagonist, whose self-manifestation continues in the covenant history of God with the community of Israel. To recognize these narratives as something more than another example of myth, one must stand within the ecclesial community that gives witness to the works of God, in a position that parallels the biblical narrator’s stance within the community of Israel. That is, one must stand with Barth and his biblical narrator within a community that witnesses to this covenant history. Barth’s entire discussion of the Genesis

divine revelation, whereas the latter, as non-theological thinking, reckons only with such apprehension of the cosmos as is possible to unaided reason, is materially confirmed on both sides by the fact that theology has to recognise and confess creation as benefit because it is the work of God in Jesus Christ, whereas philosophy is intrinsically incapable of doing this....Christian doctrine of creation must pursue its own path according to its special ground and object and independently of any and every established or future philosophical system” (343). For a discussion of the relation between theology and philosophy in III/2 see Kenneth Oakes, *Karl Barth on Theology and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2012) 200-7. Oakes focuses on §43 and seeks to explain why Barth makes fewer references to past theologians and more references to philosophers in *CD* III than any other volume. He finds that Barth’s discussion of philosophers aims to make theology more aware of its own sources and positions and of its need to go about its own ends without attempting to reconcile itself with or vouch for a specific philosophical framework or worldview. Thus, in Marcion Barth finds an example of what happens when the bond between creation and covenant is dissolved. He raises philosophical alternatives to his own doctrine, sometimes suggesting they confirm his own findings. But he insists that the dogmaticians need not be unduly excited or ashamed when discovering such affinities, for all such intellectual endeavors are pursued in the sphere of divine grace in which Jesus lived, and so they too might on occasion come close to what Christian doctrine expresses (Oakes, 204). My reading of Barth shares with Oakes the recognition that for Barth, philosophies cannot recognize creation as a divine benefit without making direct recourse to the revelation of God in Christ, and when they do this they cease to be philosophies and instead become theologies. I would suggest that the location of Barth’s discussion of philosophers is in itself significant in this respect. Only after leading the reader through a lengthy discussion of the relation between creation and covenant, and only after his extended exegetical work aimed at finding the covenant prefigured in the Genesis creation narratives, does Barth take up extended discussions of philosophers and alternate worldviews. By this point the reader who has followed him all this way will be habituated to see the inseparability of creation and covenant in his doctrine and perhaps even ready to agree with him that on such terms philosophical affinities might be interesting but ultimately need not be distracting.

sagas will thus proceed from the vantage point of a vocal witnessing member of this community of the faithful. He will position himself as one who first hears the multi-vocal witnesses of this community and then mimes that witness in his own dogmatic re-description. He will enact what he hopes is a responsiveness to the divine alterity mediated in this communal witness. He thereby sets his responsiveness in opposition to a mode of subjectivity that constructs a philosophical worldview and mythical stories from its own resources. In the next section I will follow Barth's multi-layered performance as he models for his reader the responsive and responsible agent that I described in my previous chapter. As he does so, he mimics the agents that he constructs from (or finds enacted before him in) the vantage point and witness of the Apostle's Creed and Bible, particularly in the Genesis 2 figure of Adam. His construction and performance of creedal and biblical models of faithful witness to Christ will be important to recall in my final two chapters when I expose the normative force they bring to bear in Barth's prescriptions for sexually differentiated human existence.

CONFESSING CREATION

In §40, the opening paragraph of III/1 (which precedes his exegesis of the creation narratives in §41), Barth uses the first article of the Apostle's Creed to position himself and his reader within the ecclesial community that gives a public faithful witness to the revelation of God in Christ, and to prepare his reader to focus on the divine protagonist of the creation stories and to find within these stories signs and figurations that gesture to the life-history of Jesus Christ. In so doing, he clarifies the figural relationship between the doctrine of creation and the doctrine of reconciliation, between the first article of the apostle's creed and the second, between the first two chapters of Genesis and the historical narratives of the Old and New Testaments that

follow. In the opening lines of the volume, Barth signals his refusal of an anthropocentric (rather than a christocentric) orientation toward the doctrine of creation—his refusal of an isolated, detached, and self-centered vantage point from which to approach the doctrine. He opens with a recital of the Creed’s first article, “I believe in God the Father, creator of heaven and earth” (3). In the exposition that follows he enacts a hearing and re-description of the ancient communal witness to divine activity. As an article of faith, he explains, knowledge of creation (the reality of the world and our place in it) is in itself an “undemonstrable and contestable hypothesis” (5). It is something one must hear professed in the witness of the Church and must acknowledge and confess in faith.²⁴ It cannot be sought, discovered, acquired, demonstrated, or proved from observation or logical reflection. When we are properly oriented as hearers and confessors of the first article, the real question for the dogmatician is not whether God exists, but whether in view of that confessed God, there is room for any other reality or existence alongside God (3-6).²⁵

²⁴ By pointing to the confessional stance Barth occupies in relation to the Apostle’s Creed, I mean to highlight the general public, proclamational, communal aspect of the human response to God’s revelatory activity. Barth often emphasizes the vocal and declarative character of the obedient human response to God’s revelatory activity, as I indicated in my previous chapter and will note again in the next chapter’s discussion of Adam’s naming of Eve. See Barth’s I/1, §6 discussion of the obedient human response to the revelatory address. He speaks of the acknowledgment (*Anerkennung*) of the divine address as a communication from person to person, reason to reason, and he argues that the faithful response to the divine address takes a cognitive discursive form (I/1, 205-9). See Travis McMaken’s discussion of the public confessional function that water baptism has for Barth in IV/1. McMaken explains that for Barth water baptism is a strictly human activity performed in the mode of an acknowledgment and confession of faith that responds to the saving work of God wrought in Christ and applied to the individual through Spirit baptism. As such it is a concrete public communal demonstration acknowledging the divine work wrought by God, and it gives witness to Christ and proclaims the gospel (*Sign of the Gospel*, 183). It is this sort of confessional, communal, and proclamatory witness that I am highlighting in Barth’s appropriation of the Apostle’s Creed.

²⁵ “Are we so sure that the creature-heaven and earth and we ourselves-forms a sphere which is even possible side by side with God? What reasons have we for such a view? What place is there for another when God is there? How can there be another being side by side with His being? This is the question which must always be the first and more important concern of theology when it has the biblical witness to the relation between Creator and creature constantly and consistently before it. For according to this witness the transience and therefore the impossibility of the creature before its Creator is obviously a most urgent question....If the world is not created by God, it is not. If we do not recognise that it has been created by God, we do not recognise that it is. But we know that it has been created by God only on the ground of God's self-witness and therefore in faith. Therefore we know only in faith that the world is. The pressure exerted by science on theology could have been resisted if theology had been more energetically and effectively concerned with its own (*in thesi* solemnly enough affirmed) divine science; if it had realised that it is primarily the creature and not the Creator of whom we are not certain, and that in order to be

Thus, in the opening pages of his doctrine of creation Barth occupies the decentered, dependent, and listening stance of the would-be knower-of-creation. The specter of “mythology” lingers at the edges of this opening. Only as one who occupies the hearing and witnessing stance exemplified in the Apostle’s Creed will Barth himself avoid generating myth and philosophy. Only as one who acknowledges and confesses the Creed’s triune God will he hear in the biblical saga a witness to the activity of this God in history. Having described at great length the nature of this God in his second volume of *Church Dogmatics*, with eyes firmly fixed on this God, Barth must, if he is to question the reality of anything, question the reality of himself and his world. However, he is not to question but to declare its reality with the confidence and hope of a faith whose object must be continually re-presented to him in a multi-vocal ecclesial discourse.

Barth provides a biblical model for this confessional orientation along with a model of the vantage point he is rejecting. He aligns the first article’s confession of Creator and creation with Hebrews 11.3: “through faith we understand that the ages were framed by the word of God.” Barth observes that this declaration precedes not a creed but a re-description of salvation history, the writer’s own

long recital of acts of faith on the part of men of the old covenant—a recital designed by the writer as an appeal to Christians not to cast away their confidence (10.35f.), but, in the presence of a great cloud of witnesses, to run with patience the race which is set before them, looking into Jesus, the author and finisher of the faith (12.1f). This recital (11.3) of faith in God the Creator is obviously introduced by the writer as an illustration of the faith which, having its source and perfection in Jesus Christ, was tested by the ancients and has now to be tested by Christians. Whoever rightly and patiently, and therefore with certainty, believes in the fulfilment of the promise which was given in faith, believes that the world is created by God's Word. (4)

certain of him we need proof or revelation. If it had said at once in this comprehensive sense that the creation of the world by God can be known only in faith, the unfortunate appearance of a rearguard action would have been avoided” (III/1, 6). This section of fine-print ends with reference again to Heb. 11.3, the model he is enacting.

Barth finds this same orientation and recital of faith in the voices of patristic and medieval texts, and he situates his own dogmatic activity as the hearing and reiteration of this communal witness to salvation history.

When presenting an example of the wrong sort of model to imitate, Barth reiterates his rejection of a natural theology that attempts to secure knowledge of creation from sources outside this communal, ecclesial “cloud of witnesses” to the God revealed in Christ. The nineteenth century inheritors of Schleiermacher are Barth’s exemplars of a “deeply disturbing” epistemic orientation that must be refused.²⁶ He laments that they respond to the threatening philosophies and mythologies of their day by sinking to the same level (9). Rather than allowing this external source, this cloud of witnesses, to communicate to them the proper knowledge of Creator and creation, they instead generate their doctrine from interior reflections on “the absolute feeling of dependence” or a “religious consciousness,” from which they declare and discover for themselves who and what God and the cosmos are:

although the statement of the dogma is formally approved and accepted, it is understood as a conception of man, who in this statement informs himself both about himself and also about the rest of the world, and whose task it is, as these theologians see it, to give himself this information. Constrained by his feeling of dependence, he finds his original source in God, and as he extends his feeling of dependence to the world, he makes the same discovery in relation to the world, namely, that it "seems to him" to be created, sustained and ruled by God. And so he "conceives" the creation dogma; he "determines" God as the Creator; he allows himself to "postulate" divine characteristics and functions, and to "attribute" to God the corresponding predicates; and he "puts" himself and his whole world in the relationship of dependence on God, as having "originated from God's creative power"; he "regards" it as creature, and its creation as free and spiritual, and motivated by God's love. As he sees it, he may and must "postulate" an extra-mundane cause of the world, and he makes the corresponding "religious statement," whose main features he "recognises" in essentials in the biblical account, and the Church's conception, of creation. (9)

This model exhibits the sort of self-assurance, independence, self-mastery, and solitary self-discovery of which Barth is continually critical. These are the sort of intellectual habits we will

²⁶ He quotes A. Schweitzer, R. A. Lipsius, H. Lüdemann, R. Seeberg (8).

see him attempt to unsettle and undermine in his reading of Genesis and in his depiction of Adam.

For Barth the proper object of dogmatic reflection on creation is not the human being, but the activity of the Triune God, the Creator in the first article. Barth trains the reader's gaze on the divine protagonist of the Creed's saving narrative arc, and thus on the activities of the protagonist of the biblical story of creation that he will soon retell. It is the narrative arc of the God who, as Creator, willed not to be alone in the isolation and self-sufficiency of the divine inner self-relation of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but to find fellowship with a creaturely counterpart (5-7). If God is not to be alone, then God must produce God's own others, and so God does, in an act that corresponds to the constitutive act wherein the Father willed from eternity not to be alone but to generate his own other in the Son (13-15).²⁷ The divine subject that Barth has pursued in these many pages is, therefore, a subject in pursuit of others, one who wills not to be alone, interiorly or exteriorly, one who wills to hear the voice of another:

In the same freedom and love in which God is not alone [*einsam*] in Himself but is the eternal begetter [*Erzeuger*] of the Son, who is the eternally begotten of the Father, He also turns as Creator *ad extra* in order that absolutely and outwardly He may not be alone [*einsam*] but the One who loves in freedom. In other words, as God in Himself is neither deaf nor dumb [*nicht stumm und taub*] but speaks and hears [*redet und hört*] His Word from all eternity, so outside His eternity He does not wish to be without hearing or echo [*Gehör und Echo*], that is, without the ears and voices [*die Ohren und Stimmen*] of the creature. The eternal fellowship [*Gemeinschaft*] between Father and Son, or between God and His Word, thus finds a correspondence [*Entsprechung*] in the very different but not dissimilar fellowship between God and His creature. It is in keeping with the Father of the eternal Son, the One who speaks the eternal Word as such; it is wholly worthy of Him, that in His dealings *ad extra*. He should be the Creator. (50/53)

Barth prepares the reader to seek within the Genesis accounts this divine protagonist, whose rejection of isolation and pursuit of fellowship produces alterity both internal and external to the divine life. Simultaneously, he prepares the reader to locate her or himself as this God's

²⁷ See III/1, 96: unlike human beings, God must create that other which God seeks to love.

dependent and grateful creaturely other, appropriately de-centered and humbled. In performing the role of hearer and confessor of the divine Word in the words of others, Barth reiterates the pattern he finds in the triune Son, who eternally receives and hears the spoken Word that is constitutive of his very being and re-speaks it to the Father. As incarnate Christ, the Son reiterates this hearing and responding in the sphere of humankind, himself the human paradigm of an eternal movement.

The first article's confession of Creator and creation is, for Barth, inseparable from the second article, and the two articles together delineate a narrative arc that culminates in the revelation of Christ. The first article's reference to the "heaven's and earth" conceals and prefigures the humanity of Christ confessed in the second article. "Heavens and earth" is the creedal summary of a biblical and early-church cosmology that denotes the total reality of all that is distinct from God. It views the cosmos anthropocentrically for it provides an orientation [*Orientierung*] for the human creature within an ordered unity of heavens ("an upper, larger and invisible" reality), under which the human stands on the earth ("a lower, smaller and visible" reality) (18-19/19-20). The "definite, irreversible direction" [*bestimmten, unumkehrbaren Ausrichtung*] (19/19) of this ordered sphere lends primacy [*Vorrang*] to the heavens (18/17-18). With its higher and lower realms, it depicts the lowliness and the glory of the human creature. The human being concealed [and prefigured] in the cosmos of the first article is revealed in the second article to be none other than the incarnate Jesus Christ (17).²⁸ This creedal cosmology thus has the humanity of Christ hidden at its very heart—with his analogously ordered soul and body, he exists over the earth but under heaven. This particular human being is to serve as the central point of dogmatic reference (28): "the reality of creation is and can only be known with

²⁸ On p. 18 Barth explicitly links this anthropocentric key and secret of creation to Christ's humanity (18; see 11, 19 for visible/invisible terminology).

clarity and certainty in the person of Jesus Christ” (28).²⁹ With this assertion Barth prepares the reader to expect an inseparable relationship between his doctrine of creation and his doctrine of reconciliation, and between creation history and covenant history. He prepares his reader for his highly figural reading of the Genesis creation narratives.³⁰ For Barth, there is no knowledge of the Creator or of creation that does not conceal and anticipate the knowledge of God revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.³¹

²⁹ Barth provides an explanation for his effort to locate Christ in the first article. Creation is a confession of faith, and this confession thus rests on the prior belief in God’s self-revelation of Christ, and so to assert faith in the reality of creation is to assert faith in Christ: “We have established that from every angle Jesus Christ is the key to the secret of creation. It is thus clear that the knowledge of creation, of the Creator and of the creature, is a knowledge of faith, and that here too the Christian doctrine is a doctrine of faith. In all our previous deliberations we have presupposed that we do not have an unknown but a known quantity in Jesus Christ as the revelation and fulfilment of the eternal decree of God, as very God and very man; in His work as the Reconciler of the world with God; in His existence as the Messiah of Israel and the Lord of the Church; and in His majesty over every creature in heaven and earth. It is with the help of this known quantity that we have proved what had to be proved. All deliberations stand or fall with the fact that it is a known quantity” (28).

³⁰ Barth identifies the proper protagonist of his doctrinal re-description in both creedal and dogmatic registers, and he exposes the orientation of creation toward reconciliation. Divine creative activities prefigure and point to divine reconciling activities. As the first article prefigures the second, so also Barth’s doctrine of creation prefigures the doctrine of reconciliation, and likewise the divine activity of creation history prefigures the divine activity in the history of God’s covenant of the grace with humankind. The covenant of grace is the internal meaning, end, and telos of God’s creative activity. Barth refers to this first work of creation as a “pattern [*Modell*] or veil [*Hülle*]” of the second work of the covenant of grace (44/46). Along these lines, the creature bears the promise that is unveiled in history (46). These figural claims provide the creedal support for his efforts to find Christ prefigured throughout the Genesis narratives. For a helpful comparison of the christological reorientation of the doctrine of creation by both Schleiermacher (*Christian Faith* §§36-41, 42-45) and Barth (*CD* III/1) see Kimlyn J. Bender, *Confessing Christ for Church and World: Studies in Modern Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014), 209-306. Of Barth, Bender writes, “Christ is the hermeneutical key for both creation and Scripture. Barth’s understanding of the scriptural narrative, and of doctrine, is better conceived as a set of concentric circles with Christ at the center than as a set of pearls on a chronological string. So Barth maintains that the creation narratives themselves can be rightfully understood only when seen in the light of Christ” (304-5).

³¹ “This means that the question about the origin, existence and nature of things cannot be withdrawn from the sphere of grace; that we cannot call for any independent answers foreign to this sphere or develop an independent system of thought in opposition to the revelation of God or His rule in the reconciliation of the world to Himself, as if there were a corresponding natural system of reality where the grace of God does not yet have, or no longer has, the final word. There is, of course, a realm of nature which as such is different from the realm of grace. But for all its distinctiveness there is in it nothing which does not point to grace and therefore already come from grace; nothing which can enjoy independent life or exercise independent dominion” (62).

With Christ secured as the hidden secret and key to a proper knowledge of creation the reader's place within the cosmic-salvific drama comes into view, but only indirectly. The human being reflects both the lowliness and glory of the incarnate Christ, but *only* reflects it:³²

And since the reference is to the totality of creation, to heaven and earth, it is also to man. All that the Bible and the creed say about creation as a whole points to man-and most impressively because they do not name him. They do not need to name him because in him heaven and earth are together in this fixed order [*bestimmten Ordnung*]; because man is and represents the secret [*Geheimnis*] of the creature. They do not wish to name him because it is by this solemn refusal to do so that they say the decisive thing about him-that he is on earth and under heaven, and therefore between these two worlds, which for all their distinction are still the one world created by God. The reason why God created this world of heaven and earth, and why the future world will be a new heaven and a new earth, is that God's eternal Son and Logos did not will to be an angel or animal but a man, and that this and this alone was the content of the eternal divine election of grace. He it is for whose sake God loved man from eternity and for whose sake He willed and as the Creator gave reality to the existence and being of man as this creature on earth and under heaven....He (in His humanity) is the centre of all creation, of the whole reality of which the creed says that God created it, that it has duration and existence through God alone. (18-19/ 18)

The reader finds his or her place within the company of the creedal and biblical voices only as the ears that hear, the eyes that see, and the mouth that professes Christ concealed and revealed in creaturely media that speak to God's benevolent gifting.³³

Barth secures biblical models of the seeing eye and confessing mouth that he finds concealed in the creed's perspective and voice. He notes that biblical writers seldom directly reflect on the human being as the glory, climax, and goal of creation. Genesis 1-2 are exceptional

³² Barth makes this point again later on, more concisely when he speaks of God's creation of human beings in the divine likeness in Gen. 1: "This is the God who as Creator is free for man, and the corresponding being is the man who as a creature is free for God. This God can see, recognise and discover Himself in man; and for his part the man who corresponds to Him can know God and be the seeing eye [*das sehende Auge*] at which all creation aims and which is "the true and sole motive of the cosmic process" (197/220-1).

³³ See *ibid.*

in this respect, and there are few parallel anthropocentric accounts (20-1).³⁴ The human being occupies only an incidental place in the great creation Psalm 104, and, Barth continues,

in the rest of the Psalm he is then completely lost in a host of other creatures. Similarly, in the great speech of God "out of the whirlwind" in Job 38 f., there is no mention of him among the other wonderful created figures. Unforgettable things are said about the earth, the sea and the stars, the foolish ostrich and the spirited horse, and finally the hippopotamus and the crocodile; but man seems to be ignored, except that it is he, in the person of the murmuring Job, who must constantly allow himself to be led *ad absurdum* by the question whether he had conceived, elected, determined and posited all these things. (20/21)

But this silence is instructive, for it supports Barth's suspicion that an anthropological focus on the human being, on the centrality of the human in the cosmos, can only distract from the knowledge of God as Creator and the human being as God's creature (21). Yet the reader may rest assured that this silence is, nevertheless, indicative of his (or her) location at the very (vocal) center. The reader is to be the eye that recognizes in the cosmos the products of a divine benevolent activity that has human well-fare in view—a divine activity that everywhere points to the divine activity of Christ:

As compared with Gen. 1-2 the pictures in Ps. 104 and Job 38 f. are undoubtedly like picture puzzles in which the true object is as such incorporated into many others and thus concealed. In them man has to be found, or to find himself, as the secret of heaven and earth. In Job. 38 f. it is to him that all these figures are brought forward as pertinent questioners, forcing him to withdraw his accusation, to regret his defiance, and to make his peace with God (42^{1f.}), and thus making possible and accomplishing his reinstatement (42^{7f.}). According to Ps. 104^{14f.}, it is to supply the needs of man that the earth brings forth its fruits: "That food may come forth from the earth; and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart." And it is man who in face of the marvels of God's creation addressed himself at the beginning and end of the 104th Psalm: "Bless the Lord, O my soul." Man was certainly not required to make the work of creation great and glorious. *As Luther so profoundly emphasises, man is only the eye and ear, the reason and sense, to perceive the greatness and glory of it; and only the mouth appointed to praise this work.* But for this very reason he is the more impressively accredited with his right and incomparable honour in the centre of the whole, and his existence and being are the more eloquently described, than is the case when he is made the object of special praise, as so often in the piety of the Enlightenment. (21/21; italics are mine)

³⁴ Barth names Is. 45.12 and Ps. 8 as the only other texts (20-1).

Barth mimics the stance of the Psalmist and Job, having eyes that are ready to see signs of divine grace (gifts and as such prefigurations of the gift of the incarnate Christ), throughout that creaturely sphere that scripture and creed present to him, and the mouth and pen to respond as a grateful recipient. This is the vantage point and stance Barth will soon occupy when he surveys the creation stories through the biblical writer's imaginative gaze. He will find himself at the center of God's creative works, specifically as a beneficiary of the divine grace communicated in numerous creaturely gifts (existence itself, secure habitable boundaries, nourishment, companion co-workers, etc.), which in various ways point to the ultimate divine self-gifting of Christ. He will also understand himself to be the responsible servant of this creaturely world, and, as such, himself a sign of God's grace to it—a sign of Christ. From this vantage point Barth will find Christ hidden and prefigured throughout the Genesis creation narratives, just as he finds him concealed within the “heavens and earth” of the first article. Thus Barth continues in that role we saw him playing in §18, as he performs for the reader a stance he finds the biblical writers enacting, namely an orientation outward (never inward, never directly self-reflective) toward the creaturely media of divine revelation, and with the dispositions of dependency, humility, gratitude and praise.

Barth refers the reader to the revolutionary character of this proper knowledge of creation when he goes on to describe what this faith entails—that is, when he describes “what kind of faith it is that, as faith in Jesus Christ, contains within itself the knowledge of the secret of creation, the Creator and the creature” (32). To recognize Christ as the secret center of the cosmos is to recognize the cosmos as the secret center of Christ, and this recognition demands our awareness that we stand always in the presence of the Creator, who has power and control over all of creation (whether we recognize it or not), and whose power and presence radically transform the

world we perceive (32-33). To clarify and support this claim, Barth's first supporting example is Paul's change in attitude regarding the relationship between Jews and Gentiles with respect to the issue of circumcision. Paul no longer sees himself, the Gentiles, or Christ as he did before he was confronted with the crisis of Christ's crucifixion. Now he sees himself together with them and Christ in a new light—he views them within a new creation (33). Here Barth signals his continual interest in unsettling those conventional and seemingly irreducible orders of creation, those reified differences that he had in view in I/2, §18, most particularly ethnic and religious differences. To declare faith in the creation and thus in Christ is to stand in critical relation to the conventional ways of perceiving the created order. Barth immediately evokes a list of Pauline Scriptures as evidence of Paul's change in perception:

The parallel passage in Col. 3¹⁰ says that Christians should put on the new man, i.e. (in close approximation to 2 Cor. 4^{5f.} and Gal. 6^{15f.}), the man who is renewed in knowledge after the image of his Creator, where the distinctions between Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond and free are without substance and of no account, but Christ is all in all. In Eph. 2¹⁵ too the realisation of Christian existence beyond the enmity of Jew and Gentile is described (in full accord with Gal. 6¹⁵) as a κτίξεν of two into one new man; and the making of peace (the breaking down of the middle wall, v. 14) between the two as a ποιῆν, which in this case is expressly the ποιῆν of Jesus Christ Himself. (34/36)

Conspicuous in its absence from this list of scriptures is Galatians 3:28 ("There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" [RSV]). As we will see, Barth is well aware of the use of this particular scripture by feminists. To mention it in this context could only undermine Barth's efforts later on to single out sexual difference as the one irreducible divider of human beings. He will however want to depict his re-instantiation of sexual difference as a revolution of contemporary myths, social configurations, and essentializations.

RE-IMAGINING THE CREATION SAGAS

Barth's exposition of Genesis 1-2 is framed within this multi-layered effort to articulate the inseparable relationship between the doctrine of creation and the doctrine of reconciliation. Having situated this relationship within the Creed's narrative of triune activity, he turns to the bible's "historical narrative" [*Geschichtsschreibung*], in which the triune God remains the central actor. Here he distinguishes the Genesis creation narratives [*Schöpfungsberichten*] from other history-like narratives of the Old Testament, working to disentangle them from the genre of myth.³⁵ He identifies Genesis 1-2 as a unique telling of "history," itself a term to which he gives a distinctive definition. History [*Geschichte*] as Barth understands it, has divine (not human) activity governing its narrative arc. It is "the sequence of events in which God concludes and executes this covenant with man" (59), and as such it is always accessed by the narration and witness of the community of faith. The creation narratives of Genesis 1-2 are history in this sense. The divine protagonist's activity is narrated in a sequence of once and for all events. However, it is a unique genre of narrative, for much of God's *Geschichte* narrated in the Bible had humans present to witness it, and they were enabled and inspired by the Holy Spirit to perceive and comprehend in historical [*historische*] events the hidden divine activity moving them (65-82). The divine activity of creation narrated in Genesis 1-2 occupies a special place within this salvation history as the first of all God's works *ad extra* (59-60). It is unique because there were no humans present to perceive, comprehend, and witness to God's activity at work in

³⁵ With the divine activity of creation and reconciliation thus ordered, Barth has set up the creedal and trinitarian framework for his configuration of the creation narratives as a distinctive type of history. He addresses a widely perceived gap between the "non-historical" stories of Gen. 1-2 (usually designated as myth) and the history-like narratives that follow in Genesis and other narratives of the Old Testament—an apparent yawning abyss between two different realities that might lend support to a natural theology in which knowledge of God and of the human being is gained independently of reflection on God's saving activity culminating in Christ (61). He continues to resist any support for a "natural system of reality where the grace of God does not yet have, or no longer has, the final word," for such would be a foreign sphere in which we can only "feel isolated and threatened" (62).

the sequence of events being described. The events described in Genesis 1-2 are thus the unmediated activity of God (65-79). Unlike the “covenant history” that follows in the rest of the Old and New Testament narratives, this divine activity is not accessible to theoretical reason in the medium of human activity. In this way Barth distinguishes creation history from covenant history: they both feature the divine protagonist, but creation history prefigures and anticipates the divine activity of covenant history.³⁶

³⁶ In his use of the category of history (*Geschichte*) Barth’s eye is toward the divine activity at work in the sequence of events that are witnessed to and proclaimed by biblical voices. The events to which they witness become the object of historical (*historische*) inquiry, but Barth himself is interested in *historische* only as it mediates the *Geschichte* of God’s self-revealing movement. So, when he wishes to specifically designate that which humans perceive and comprehend and describe as history-tellers (or as historical-critical scholars), he prefers to speak of *Historie*. The covenant history [*der Geschichte des Bundes Gottes mit dem Menschen*] that Barth hears narrated for him in biblical texts and in turn re-describes is then always the *Geschichte* of God’s self-revealing activity, concealed in and moving the sequences of historical [*historische*] events which are themselves the media of the Bible’s and creeds’ witness and proclamation. The narratives of Gen. 1-2 are a unique genre for Barth because the activity of the primary mover of this history is described without mediation by a voice that has no recourse to human witnesses of the events being described. In this sense it is *unhistorische Geschichte* or *Præhistorie*, having parallels in biblical narratives of miracles and above all to the resurrection, due to the inaccessibility of what is being described to theoretical reason (see III/1, 78-9/84-5). Adam Neder notes that Barth uses the category of history (*Geschichte*) and covenant synonymously, as seen in his use of such phrases as “Jesus Christ’s history” and “the history of the covenant” (Adam Neder, “History in Harmony: Karl Barth on the Hypostatic Union,” in *Karl Barth and American Evangelicalism*, ed. Bruce McCormack and Clifford B. Anderson [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011], 148-76; esp. 151; fn. 8). We see his conception of *Geschichte* playing out in Barth’s focus on the divine activity of the covenant maker in establishing and upholding the elected covenant as it unfolds in history (all in the telling of the Bible and creeds). Thus Jason Springs notes that while Barth does not deny the significance of historical critical inquiry, he focuses almost entirely on the transcendent aspect of history (“But did it Really Happen? Frei, Henry, and Barth on Historical Reference and Critical Realism,” in *ibid.*, 271-99, esp. 281, fn 23). See David W. Congdon, *The Mission of Demythologizing: Rudolf Bultmann’s Dialectical Theology* (Minneapolis, Fortress, 2015), esp. 182-6. Congdon exposes in Barth’s distinction between myth and saga an implicit reaction to Bultmann’s understanding of myth and his project of demythologizing scriptures. Congdon notes that Barth was writing his doctrine of creation (III/1 was published in 1945) during a time when Bultmann was responding to controversy resulting from his announcement of his demythologizing program. As Congdon notes, Barth’s critique of Bultmann does not become explicit until III/2, (published in 1948). Indeed Barth only mentions Bultmann once in III/1, listing him alongside a string of others (Gunkel, Baumgartner, Rühle, Tillich) who have written articles on the place of myth in modern ethnology and religious science, and he complains that since none of these have offered clarification on the distinction between myth, saga, fable, legend, and anecdote in their respective relations to history, he will have to make his own way (III/1, 81). Congdon exposes the ways in which Barth’s depiction of creation as saga subtly responds to Bultmann, and he highlights the influence of Barth’s definition of myth (as that which recognizes only humans and their cosmos, having no history, creator, or lord of its own) on the reception of Bultmann in the Anglo-American theology, specifically its view of myth as a cloak for dispensable timeless anthropological truths that have nothing to do with the divine. Congdon faults this account for a negative and erroneous understanding of Bultmann’s demythologizing project as preoccupied with human self-understanding, and he aims to disentangle Bultmann’s program of demythologizing from a Barthian inspired construal of myth in order to show that Bultmann’s understanding of myth is far more closely affiliated with Barth than scholars have realized.

Creation history requires a distinctive genre for its telling. The poetic and imaginative genre of “saga” [*Sage*] makes it well disposed to tell the story of unmediated divine activity for which there are no human witnesses. Saga relies on imagination [*Phantasie*] rather than theoretical reason’s capacity to “perceive” [*wahrnehmen*] and “comprehend” [*begreifen*]-capacities implicated in the telling of *Historie* (91/99).³⁷ The biblical narrators of the Genesis sagas put imagination to work, but their imagination is constrained in the service of witness to divine activity, for the narrators write as those who have been “encountered by God, the Lord, The Creator of heaven and earth,” and they are situated within the confessional community of Israel that has produced these other “historical” narratives of God’s saving history. Barth does not wish to suggest that this mode of biblical witness is the pure product of reason’s imaginative generative capacities (a characteristic of “myth” as he defines it). He wants instead to secure Genesis 1-2 as an imaginative response to an encounter or confrontation with the divine actor, thereby retaining its objectivity and realism as a response to the imposition of divine alterity (91/100). Barth thus constructs the Genesis sagas as occupying a narrative vantage point and

³⁷ Barth notes that *Historie* is not the sole mode of the biblical telling of *Geschichte* but only one of them. Alongside historical narrative (“der historische Bericht der Bibel”) and its telling of *Historie*, there is found the Genesis saga’s telling of *Praehistorie* and the prophetic literature’s telling of *Posthistorie* (90/99). Since the Genesis creation sagas do not tell the story of a *Geschichte* that any human being could access via theoretical reason, saga is a history that relies heavily on the imagination and must be read as an imaginative “intuitive and poetic picture of a pre-historical reality of history which is enacted once and for all within the confines of time and space” (81). Elements of saga, Barth tells us (in keeping with his reconfiguration of “history”) are found throughout the historical accounts of biblical narratives, which frequently contain a mixture of that which is perceivable and that which is not (history being “the account which rests on perception and concept, and which in the region of perception and concept deduces, compares, co-ordinates, and in this way demonstrates” [82]). Saga “looks to the point where from the standpoint of “history” everything is dark, although in fact it is only from this point that “history” can emerge and be clear” (83). Barth distinguishes Gen. 1-2 from other biblical narratives that require some imagination to describe divine activity inaccessible to perception (i.e. miracles and the resurrection), for where the latter have a mixture of “history” and “saga,” Gen. 1-2 is “pure saga” without mixture, preoccupied strictly with divine activity, for which no human witnesses were present, but which narrates the emergence of that arena in which history will commence (81-2). For a helpful discussion on Barth’s understanding of Gen. 1-2 as saga in its relation to historical referent, see K.E Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram*, 179-90.

gaze that models and reflects the one he performs.³⁸ The narrator of biblical saga is part of a communal hearing and witnessing of the covenant history of Yahweh with Israel, from which he produces a story of origins that prefigures this saving history.³⁹ Likewise Barth in turn hears in this communal witness (to both creation history and the covenant history of Israel) prefigurations of that history's culmination in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ (91-2). Furthermore, Barth will claim that only the reader who has likewise been encountered by the God of this saving history (standing in the company of Barth and his Genesis-narrator as a beneficiary of this communal history of the covenant) will recognize in Genesis 1-2 the history-like witnesses to the creating activity of the God and Father of Jesus Christ. Such a reader will not view these stories as myths of origin, mere coverings for an esoteric timeless truth (91-2, 86-7).⁴⁰

³⁸ Barth's narrator (like Barth himself) "has neither the time nor the desire to be occupied with the origination of the world and man in general, but with that of the world and the man whose existence will receive its meaning in the execution of God's covenant. Already, then, in this origination as God's creation he can seek and find not merely the intention of a future covenant but its foundation and lineaments" (267).

³⁹ Kathryn Tanner notes that Barth follows the lead of biblical scholars like Gerhard von Rad when he finds in the creation accounts of Genesis a text written later than key biblical narratives of Israel's history and thus a text that reflects retrospectively on the significance of creation for the history of Israel that follows. Thus in Barth's reading, subsequent books of the Hebrew Bible are the best commentary on Genesis, and Barth sees himself to be extending this principle when he reads New Testament texts as the best commentary on books in the Old Testament ("Creation and providence," in *Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2000) 111-126, esp. 113-4). I would add to this assessment that Barth's retrospective positioning of the Genesis creation sagas as a witness to a covenant history that is already underway allows him to construct a biblical model for his own confessional and figural vantage point. He positions himself in a parallel communal and retrospective relation to the history of Christ's life, death, and resurrection that the biblical narrator occupies in relation to the covenant history of Israel. He extends his retrospective gaze back into the arena of Israel's history to find Christ prefigured there as his biblical narrator finds Yahweh's relation to Israel prefigured in creation history.

⁴⁰ With Christ as the hidden secret of the creation narrative, Barth supplants any approach to the texts that detaches the meaning of these narratives (and sexual difference) from a Christocentric frame of reference. Throughout his readings of both narratives his dialectic of gospel and law can be discerned (a point I will develop in my next chapter). In prefiguring salvation history, the narratives present the hidden Christ to the reader as the gift whom the recipient must gratefully recognize, acknowledge, and imitate. This nascent ethical-confessional orientation, seen already in §18, becomes especially clear in the figure of Adam in Genesis 2. Luther's "A Brief Instruction on What to Look for and Expect in the Gospels" (in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989], 104-11) is informative as a model and precedent for what Barth does both here in III/1 and in §18. Luther construes the gospel as a narrational arc that presents Jesus Christ to the reader as a gift to be received and only as such an example to imitate. The gospel is found wherever this story is presented, in Old Testament and New. Luther describes the gospel as a chronicle, story, or narrative about Christ, telling who he is. There is only one gospel, described by many apostles. In its most minimal form it tells us that Christ is Son of God, and became man for us, died, was raised, and established as Lord over all. Paul presents this minimal form of the

Having construed saga as a divinely guided, communally contextualized, exercise in imagination, Barth's reading of Genesis 1-2 employs contemporary interpretive tools to imaginatively and empathetically appropriate the gaze of the narrator—to imagine the divine activity through the perspective of the narrative's gaze.⁴¹ Barth accepts and assumes the modern theory of authorship of Genesis 1-2, he speaks freely of P and J passages, and he refers at times to the author and at other times to the editor or redactor of the text. But ultimately he is interested in the perspective of the text itself. He constructs the literal grammatical sense of the text using a variety of available hermeneutical tools (word searches, textual reconstruction, etc.), and premodern commentaries (especially Augustine and Calvin) as well as modern Jewish and Christian commentaries that rely on historical-critical methods. However, his overarching goal is to find creation's prefigurative relationship to covenant history, and so he will situate the biblical

gospel, bypassing many incidents in the four books, and the prophets do so too in places such as Is. 53 when they speak of Christ—all this is proper gospel for Luther. Barth's reading resonates with Luther here, for he finds this minimal story-arc of Jesus concealed in the creation of the first man and his acquisition of a human partner. It is this story that Barth narrates, but in a broader trinitarian narrative, when he opens his volume with a discussion of the first article's relation to the second. But this is not the only resonance of Barth with Luther. Barth is also occupied with situating gospel before law in that dialectic that I described in my previous chapter. In the above cited work, Luther argues that the Gospel story provides not simply an example of how we ought to act, [a law to conform to], but first it presents to us a gift that we must accepted and recognize as such, and only as such does it also provide an example to imitate. Jesus is that gift presented in the gospel, and he can aid the beneficiary by serving as an example to be imitated *only* when he is already recognized as a gift given by God to the self. When you have Christ in this way as gift, then you take him as your example, giving yourself in service to your neighbor as you see Christ give himself to you. Thus, for Luther, the gospel in its many different modes, first offers the benefits of Christ, by bringing Christ to you in the stories it tells. When you see the help he provides to others, you might rest assured that he provides this same help to you, accept his benefits as the gift that they are, and only having received this benefit as a gift do you also find in it an example to imitate by helping your neighbor in the same way as Christ has helped you. Luther goes on to say that in the writings of the prophets and Moses we should expect to find Christ wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in the manger: we must see him given and promised here as gift before law.

⁴¹ Hans Frei, (*Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 245) delineates the role that empathy played as a first hermeneutical step for romantic readers of myth as well as for mythophiles. Barth's way of inhabiting the perspective of the narrator can be seen in continuity with this interpretive trajectory. However, as Greene-McCreight notes, unlike many romantic readers, Barth is not interested in the inner life of the author, nor does he equate the plain sense of the text with what author is trying to convey (*Ad Litteram*, 207).

narratives in an inter-textual canonical frame of reference that occupies a critical relation to ancient and modern worldviews.⁴²

Barth's description of the relationship between the two sagas continues his work of reordering creation and covenant. The first saga (the priestly Gen. 1.1-2.4a) presents creation as the "external basis of the covenant" by showing how creation promises, proclaims, and prepares for the covenant as the sphere within which the covenant will be actualized. It narrates "the work of powerful but thoroughly planned and thought-out and perfectly supervised preparation, comparable to the building of a temple, the arrangement and construction of which is determined both in detail and as a whole by the liturgy which it is to serve" (98). It is "prophetic," for it

⁴² As is widely recognized, Barth revives an interpretive practice that finds the narrative arc of Christ's life, death, and glorification prefigured in the Old Testament. For a detailed account of the modern decline in figural readings of the Old Testament see Hans Frei, *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*. For Barth's retrieval of this interpretive practice see David Ford, *Barth and God's Story* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Petr Lang) 1985, and K.E. Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram*, 210-13. Greene-McCreight, informed by Frei's work, provides a helpful analysis of Barth's exegetical practices, especially his re-appropriation of a figural reading of the Old Testament. Greene-McCreight looks at Barth's return to a strategy of incorporating figurative reference into the "plain sense" reading of the narrative, a strategy resting on the assumption that the plain sense of scripture resides in its function to witness to Jesus Christ. Barth does not limit "plain sense" of the text (its literal or grammatical sense) to authorial meaning or intention, for he is ultimately interested more in the text itself (in its final form) than in a postulated author behind the text, although he does take interest in stylistic or thematic features of a particular author, sources the author uses, and particular interests of the author and what the author may have in mind. He recognizes that the text is composite in nature, and even at points seeks to discern the intentions and interests of the composite parts. The text might even be said to have an intention for Barth (208-9). Barth extends the plain sense to incorporate its figural references. The plain sense of the text is thus polyvalent, gathering up and uniting themes, motifs, and stories from seemingly disparate areas of canon to shed light on text at hand. He combines macro-exegesis with micro-exegesis, and puts to work his knowledge of Greek, Latin and Hebrew, working closely with the Hebrew text and comparing it with the Septuagint and Vulgate (226). He returns to the pre-modern reading practices in which "the rule of faith" circumscribed potential interpretations of what the plain sense of the text might be, and enabled a unity between the testaments (6). His employment of historical-critical resources are negotiated within the framework of a creedal rule of faith that has Christ as its central frame of reference. However, while he uses historical critical resources, his frame of reference is inter-textual, not extra-textual, and he will employ categories from within the biblical canon rather than draw them from any external worldview (ancient or modern), and this will enable him to situate the sagas in critical relationship to both ancient and modern worldviews (201-7). All of these strategies are put to service in describing the textual intent, the perspective that Barth empathetically inhabits. David Ford (*Barth and God's Story* [Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Petr Lang] 1985) speaks in a similar vein regarding Barth's figural reading of biblical narratives. The unity of the Bible is held together for Barth by the central character of Jesus Christ and the plot of his life. Barth never denies that biblical narratives refer to historical events, but he does deny that critical investigation of the events should be coordinated with exegesis of the biblical text in order to arrive at text's meaning. There is no systematic relation between the meaning of the text and the meaning of an account of events reconstructed by an historian. The hermeneutical gap between text and historical referent is overcome when the interpreter simply realizes that this narrated story is her own real world, and its central character is present and helping her to discover her place in that world (51-2).

points to and prefigures covenant history as its telos and goal in the plot's steady march towards the climax, in which God invites the first man and woman into the divine rest to which no labor on their part has entitled them. In its movement toward this rest, the first saga is "pure promise" (98-9; 233). Where the first saga is "prophetic" in pointing to the far horizons of covenant history, the second saga is "sacramental," placing the reader with Adam in the liturgical center of that cosmic-temple that the first saga describes.⁴³ Here the story of creation "is itself already a unique sign of the covenant and a true sacrament" (232/262-3), for it re-enacts (through Adam)

⁴³ Barth's 1923 discussion of Luther on sacraments in 1519 can help shed light on Barth's hasty use of the language of sacrament here and in §18, and similar themes will be seen in his reading of Genesis 2, although after *CD II/2* Barth's use of such language emphasizes the centrality and efficacy of christological activity (Karl Barth, "Luther's Doctrine of the Eucharist: its Basis and Purpose" in *Theology and Church: Shorter Writings 1920-1928*, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith [London: SCM Press, 1962], 74-111). Most notably, divine activity selects and enables mundane elements to function as signs that point to Christ and that mediate his presence to the believer. For Barth the mediation of presence through the sign is a momentary divinely enabled gift that happens only when and where God chooses to act. Features of Barth's account resonate in his earlier appreciative discussion of Luther (the Luther that preceded the sacramental controversies seems less problematic to Barth than the later Luther). As Barth describes it, for Luther sacrament is a divine sign, wherein Christ is promised, given and received (93). The sacrament is the act of God joining God's Word to a sign, a divine work first and foremost, not a human work. And this act, unsolicited and completely gratuitous, gives the human direction and promise (74). This function does not depend on any sacramental character of the material element but rather on the Word joined to the element. Without the Word they are not sacraments (75). We must keep this privileging of divine activity in mind when Barth presents sexual difference, a mundane feature shared with animals, as the divine likeness. Barth will speak here of divine selection of a mundane feature of human existence and continue to insist on the need for divine activity in order for this feature to bear divine likeness. Notable also in Barth's reading of Luther is the gospel/law dialectic that Barth deploys so often. For Luther, as I receive love and support in the sacrament I show in return love and support to Christ and to his needy ones, through mutual burden bearing, joint possession of all things in Christ, etc.: "From the eating and drinking of the body and blood of Christ follows the result that we 'in turn allow ourselves to be eaten and drunk by others; that is, we devote all our actions, all our life to furthering the advantage of our neighbor,' that we say to our neighbor, 'take me, eat em, drink me! not in jest but in earnest,' for 'I have enough and plenty when I have Christ'" (95-6). In configuring the biblical narrative of creation sacramentally Barth also echoes Calvin's wider use of sacrament, when Calvin says the term sacrament "embraces generally all those signs which God has ever enjoined on men to render them more certain and confident of the truth of his promises. He sometimes willed to present these in natural things, at other times set them forth in miracles." Examples of the former natural sacraments for Calvin include Adam and Eve's tree of life (Barth will explicitly refer to this tree as sacramental), and Noah's rainbow: here hitherto mundane creaturely things are inscribed by God's Word taking a new form. Barth will give sexual difference a sacramental function, whereby something mundane is enabled to do what in itself it cannot. For miracle-sacraments, Calvin refers to Abraham's smoking fire pot light and Gideon's fleece. He also designates rituals such as circumcision, purification, and sacrifice as sacramental. The more fully Christ is revealed the more clearly do sacraments attest to him: thus Calvin privileges baptism, and Eucharist over other rituals (1293-98). Calvin too evinces that pattern that Luther and Barth do—of noting first what the sacraments do for us before the response they impose on us. Sacraments have the purpose of directing and leading by the hand to Christ; they are images that represent him and show him forth to be known; seals of God's promises, and since Christ is the promise offered to us, they show forth Christ (1296). *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. by John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster 1960) 4.14, §§18-22; pp 1294-99.

key moments in the gospel plot of Jesus' life, death and resurrection (232-3), and in so doing it situates humankind as objects and responding subjects of divine saving activity.⁴⁴

Barth's account of sexual difference and its ordering is developed most fully in his reading of Genesis 2. I will argue in the next chapter that Adam's seeking and naming of his female counterpart provides Barth a normative model of the sort of the proclamatory stance of faith that he has been enacting, with significant parallels to the model of neighbor-love that the fallen Israelite and the Good Samaritan enact (but also with notable differences, now that sexual difference is implicated). But before turning to Genesis 2 in the next chapter, I will note several key features of the exegesis of Genesis 1 (the first creation saga) that are informative for the gender dynamics of Genesis 2. First Barth's consistent rejection of interpretations that find maternal imagery in the narratives discloses his underlying assumptions about female bodily passivity. Second his identification of the relation between the sexes as the divine likeness itself (reflecting but not identical to the *imago Dei*) will exhibit the sacramental characteristics of neighbor-love that I pointed to in my previous chapter. In these features Barth will sustain his rejection of an orders of creation framework for locating social relationships. Divine likeness will depend on a continual divine, revelatory activity and will never be an innate possession or human capacity or faculty.

⁴⁴ There is ambiguity in Barth's distinction here between the prophetic and the sacramental for both sagas prefigure and point to the saving work of God in Christ. McMaken (*Sign of the Gospel*, 186-92) observes that Barth is not always precise when speaking about "sacraments" or the "sacramental," and we see this lack of precision here. McMaken argues that after his reformulation of a reformed doctrine of election in II/2, Barth's soteriology has no place for a traditional position on sacraments in which salvation is achieved by Christ but requires subsequent application to individuals through the sacraments. This underlies Barth's commitment to the idea that Christ alone is the Christian sacrament (IV/2 50), and to his limiting of the sacramental to Christ's own saving history and to the event of Spirit baptism which applies this saving activity to particular individuals (carefully distinguished from water baptism which belongs to the public obedient response of faith to this divine activity). McMaken does, however, note that Barth uses the language of sacrament more generally to refer to the intersection of divine and human action in a revealing and reconciling event (186-7). It is in this the sense that Barth describes the second saga as sacramental and distinguishes it from the more prophetic prefigural first saga. We will see in the next chapter that Adam of Gen. 2, not only prefigures the saving work of Christ but also models the proper free and obedient human response to divine activity, and there again Barth will speak of the general sacramental character of the encounter between God and Adam.

MYTH-CRITIQUE, MATERNAL AVERSION, AND SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

Most of Barth's effort to place the creation sagas in a resistant relation to competing mythology is done in his reading of Genesis 1 and is most clearly evident in his interpretation of Genesis 1:2: "And the earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (102). Barth recognizes with Gunkel features of a mythic cosmology in this verse's three components: its reference to *tohu wa-bohu*, to darkness over the face of the deep, and to the brooding "Spirit of Elohim." Barth argues that this mythic cosmology is incorporated into the saga not as a positive appropriation, but rather as a critical rejection of competing mythologies (108). He objects to readings in which a primordial chaos exists prior to God's creative activity or is the first step in God's creative activity. He insists that the features of this verse are antithetical to the picture presented in v.1 and in the rest of the saga of an Elohim who creates an orderly, limited, and secure cosmos by the power of divine fiat alone. For Barth there can be no place within this saga for a God who makes positive use of chaos and darkness or for a God who relates to chaos as this verse depicts. Barth's Old Testament God will only say "No" to chaos and any cooperation with it by speaking an orderly creation into being. Barth thus construes v.2 as a summation of all that God rejects when in v.3 God first speaks, ushering into existence the beginning of all things that are not-God.

Gendered assumptions are at play here as features of v. 2 evoke for Barth (and some of the commentaries he relies on) maternal imagery embedded in the mythological worldview that v.3 rejects. Barth declares that in v.2 "the Spirit of *Elohim* is condemned to the complete impotence of a bird hovering or brooding over shoreless or sterile waters," an activity Barth finds akin to a "passive contemplative role and function" [*passiv-kontemplative Rolle und Funktion*] (107/118-9). Such imagery suggests the powerlessness of this God's activity to effect a limitless

and unproductive chaos. Barth finds this to be completely antithetical to the Old Testament Elohim whose “creation means the irruption and revelation of the divine compassion” [*Schöpfung heißt Einbruch und Offenbarung des göttlichen Erbarmens*] (110/122). On the one hand, then, the maternal imagery of a brooding dove hovering over a “World-egg” is too impotent for the relation of Barth’s paternal Elohim to creation. So, Barth’s narrator produces a God who, like Barth’s own God, elects to be the God who loves in freedom and therefore to create an orderly and secure world—a God who, in so doing, simultaneously elects the sort of world and sort of God he will not be (thereby rejecting a chaotic and threatening creation, and also rejecting a passive and impotent mode of being).⁴⁵ On the other hand, maternal imagery has too much generative capacity for Barth to risk its association with the material that God creates and manipulates in further creative activity. Barth rejects any positive associations of this watery chaos with “a world-egg or a mother-womb which bears the future” (104/114).⁴⁶ This watery boundless chaos must be viewed as sterile and barren, that is, as completely lacking in internal resources for the production of the orderly world God creates. Barth takes comfort in commentators who foreground the paternal character of the saga, using them to support his claim that in v.2-3 the narrator rejects myth and its matriarchal imagery: “All explanations of the origin of the world in terms of divine conception and birth are superseded when the ‘And God said’ is put at the beginning” (114).

Barth’s interpretive rejection of maternal imagery in Genesis 1 continues further on in his reading of the chapter. In the emergence of animals from the earth on the sixth day (Gen.

⁴⁵ As articulated in *CD II/1*, §28: “The Being of God as the One who Loves in Freedom” (257-321).

⁴⁶ “die freundlichen Bilder eines zukunftssträchtigen Welteneies oder Weltenmutter Schoßes” (*KD*, 114).

1:24), Barth declares: “We are spared the thought of a bearing ‘mother earth’ as the principle of the world (Gunkel)” (179).⁴⁷ He will make similar assertions later on when discussing the Genesis 2 account of the construction of Adam from dust, there departing from Bonhoeffer who sees the earth as womb-like. In the divine command directing fish and birds to be fruitful and multiply, Barth finds a prefiguration of covenant history that will have at its center “a God-like creature ordained for fatherhood and sonship and continuing its existence in the relationship of fatherhood and sonship” (169-71), but he makes no reference to third parties or mother figures whose generative capacities might be needed to secure creaturely sonship, nor does he reference daughters (198-9).⁴⁸

⁴⁷ In her critique of Barth’s phallogocentric logic, especially as depicted in his exegesis of Gen. 1, Catherine Keller (*Face of the Deep*) attends closely to Barth’s effacement of maternal imagery. She provides an insightful feminist analysis of Barth’s idiosyncratic treatment of Gen. 1.2 where Barth identifies feminine imagery for divinity with that idolatrous and chaotic matter that God rejects (see 90-5). Regarding Barth’s “impotent,” “hovering and fluttering,” “passive contemplative” “Spirit of *Elohim*,” Keller notes that “the gender of the bird itself slides menacingly between mother and male.” Here “Barth bats a double-whammy for Protestant virility. An inadequate masculinity ‘flutters’ above an abortive femininity....Any concept therefore of a generative chaos, a spontaneous natality, must be sterilized. As to any God who demonstrates queer male or any female propensities—Barth kills both birds with a single stone” (94). Keller links Barth’s treatment of chaos and maternal imagery to his §54 ordering of sexual difference in terms of sequence (III/4, 169), and she asks: “Does Barth’s gender logic only make explicit and literal motives that otherwise remain metaphorically indirect, to be teased out of the small print of bigger matters?” Keller finds in the subordination of woman to man Barth’s “social template of chaos-control” (95). Woman does not represent the chaos except when she gets out of order (96). Willis Jenkins (*Ecologies of Grace*), shares Keller’s objections to Barth’s hierarchical and sexist view of sexual difference, but while he is amused by Barth’s bold departure from the apparent sense of Gen. 1.2, he is critical of Keller’s overall assessment for focusing exclusively on Barth’s reading of Gen. 1 and not attending to his reading of Gen.2. Noting that Barth’s resistance of maternal imagery should be read as Barth’s 1945 “fearful triumphant rejection not of the divine feminine but of Nazi geopolitics” (162), he argues that the sort of typologically feminine moments that Barth effaces in Gen. 1 he celebrates in Gen. 2. If Barth’s Gen. 1 Creator rejects all that is aqueous, fecund, fluid, material, and chaotic, Jenkins notes in Gen. 2, Barth’s God finds a place for generative and aqueous language along with creaturely agencies missing in Gen. 1: “In the Garden God makes a place for creaturely generativity and freedom, for wildness responsive to God’s initial act” (164). He argues that “Keller’s ‘tehomitic fecundity’ seems everywhere in Eden” (164), colored by the many metaphors Keller faults Barth for squashing in Gen. 1: “Keller somehow misses the aqueous, generative metaphors of this second saga, where humans arrive with the rain and attend a womblike garden overflowing with surprising new life and rivers of water” (162). For Jenkin’s full critique of Keller see 161-4. See fn. 50 below for my relationship to this discussion, specifically my agreement with Jenkins on this overall depiction of the imagery of Gen. 2 in Barth’s reading, and my disagreement that Barth is here more friendly to the maternal. Contra Jenkins, Barth continues in Gen. 2 to explicitly refuse any analogy between the fecundity of Eden and maternal bodies. I will suggest Keller’s critique should not be so readily dismissed.

⁴⁸ Implicit in his discussion of Gen. 1:22 (169-70) and later on explicit in his discussion of Adam’s begetting of Seth in his own image (Gen. 5.3) Barth evokes Old Testament patrilineal genealogies to legitimize his own silence regarding the maternal function in human procreation and also his detachment of sexual reproduction from the

Barth's rejection of maternal imagery is clearly embedded in his critique and rejection of myth, and we hear in his refusals echoes of his contemporaries' interest in matriarchal myths of origin. However there is more to Barth's objection of maternal imagery than his aversion to the

divine likeness of the relation between the sexes. He sees an Old Testament perception of human reproduction that has (like himself) only fathers and sons in view, and he neglects to recall at this juncture the many Old Testament narratives in which mothers play a prominent role (as do themes of barrenness, conception, and birth). He points out that it is significant that Old Testament genealogies do not mention women, and he does so in the very context of arguing that the divine likeness is not associated with sexual reproduction (the divine likeness does not reside in Adam's capacity to reproduce himself in a son), but in the relation between men and women. In this respect while females are disassociated from any maternal function, males remain vaguely associated with sexual reproduction in Barth's imaginary, at least in so far as they play a role in a covenant history that moves forward genealogically toward the birth of the messiah. For Barth will frame this Old Testament interest in genealogies as a prophetic orientation in hope for the messiah. Interestingly, Barth neglects to note Jesus lack of a human father and the role of Mary in birthing him (198-99), even though such a point would support his enjoyment of highlighting human incapacity to accomplish divine ends. Females bodies are thus in a very peculiar way detached from any maternal role in Barth's imaginary engagement with Gen. 1-2. I have suggested in this chapter that Barth's effacement of maternal imagery should not be solely attributed to his aversion to Nazi and German Christian rhetoric on maternity (both spiritual and bodily). His assumptions about the passivity of female bodies interferes with and contributes to his theological decisions to disassociate its imagery from divine activity, while at the same time its generative function makes it problematic for any association with the material from which God constructs life. When it comes to his description of interpersonal relationships between men and women, however Barth's efforts to dissociate any maternal function from that relation may find a further explanation in his own personal life in which he faced many domestic tensions and outside criticisms for moving von Kirschbaum (the woman he wanted to divorce his wife for) permanently into his family home. Selinger finds in von Kirschbaum's and Barth's theology of sexual difference a commentary on their relationship (*Charlotte von Kirschbaum*, 20-1). In noting similarities that von Kirschbaum and Barth share in their connection of the divine image with the relation between men and women, Selinger draws attention to published statements made by both of them, which Selinger describes as "self-exculpatory theology." When depicting the sexually differentiated I-Thou relationship as the divine likeness, in the course of exegeting Gen. 2:18, in *Die wirkliche Frau*, von Kirschbaum writes: "it may well be that the single man or single woman lives more strongly in encounters than many a man or woman in marriage" (qtd. in *ibid.*, 23). Selinger points also to Barth's discussion of the close relationships between men and women who are not married (III/3, 165/183-4), and to his statement: "And, let it not be forgotten, there is genuine, strong, and whole-hearted love even in relationships which cannot flower in regular marriage, but which in all their fragmentariness are not mere sin and shame, and do not wholly lack the character of marriage" (III/4, 239/268; qtd. in *ibid.*, 24). With such suggestively autobiographical statements in view, Barth's efforts to detach maternity from the role the female plays in the I/Thou relation might be implicated in these self-exculpatory endeavors. By the time of this volume's publication, von Kirschbaum was entrenched permanently within his family life (having relocated to Switzerland with the family in 1935). Barth's depiction of the paradigmatic relationship between the sexes is one in which the man retains a (short-term prophetic) paternal function while the maternal function of woman brings nothing to bear on her role in prefiguring covenant history. Mothers and female-helpers appear to occupy two detached roles the latter of which Barth greatly appreciates, the former of which he effaces. As a sign of the covenant history, males might have the side-role of fathering sons, however they require no mothers of their own, or mothers to facilitate their reproduction, only obedient, supporting fellow workers who enable their confessional declarations. In this respect Barth's picture of Adam and Eve (as we will see more clearly in the next chapter) appears to reflect his own close relationship to and love for von Kirschbaum and his mistreatment of his wife, Nelly in bringing von Kirschbaum into their home. Along these same lines, it is interestingly that while Barth has no place for the maternal function or for sexual reproduction in his picture of a happy relationship between the sexes, von Kirschbaum, cohabiting with Nelly and her many children, is eager to secure a role for spiritual mothers, to which she devotes much attention in her work with female figures in the Old Testament, and as Selinger notes, she speaks at one point of "a motherly existence which vies with [*übergreift*] biological motherhood. There are prophetic women whom become spiritual mothers" (qtd. in *ibid.*, 23).

valorization of the maternal and the mythological in contemporary trends (and Nazi ideologies). There is also more to it than his anxiety regarding the dependency of Genesis 1-2 on contemporaneous mythologies, although both these factors undoubtedly play a significant role. Barth's ambivalent assumptions about maternity (both its generative passivity and its generative capacities) make him uncomfortable with associating maternal imagery with God's activity or with the material that God uses when drawing some creaturely entities out of others. God is too active and powerful to be depicted by the imagery of maternal fecundity. The material that God uses is too inert for the ends to which God puts it for Barth to risk its association with maternal fecundity. For the capacity of a woman's body to conceive might suggest a capacity of creaturely material for the creative work God does with it, which in turn might lend support to an anthropology in which human beings have a capacity for (or a point of contact with) the revelatory and redemptive work of God. The phallic fantasy of a paternal reproduction that requires no third-party active collaborators would be troubled by the intervention of such imagery. Thus Barth must dissociate the imagery of maternal fecundity from his picture of the creation of some creaturely entities out of others. His God can only be the Father of creation in the face of an utter incapacity for creaturely life.⁴⁹ We will see more of this in his reading of Genesis 2.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ In the next chapter I will draw on Barth's earlier discussions of the virgin conception of Christ, found in a published series of lectures on Luke 1 and also in I/2, §15. In both texts he presents the virgin conception of Christ as a creation of something new, in which God acts on a creature that is utterly incapable of the new thing God brings from it: God enables the virgin to do what she cannot do otherwise—conceive without a male partner.

⁵⁰ My analysis and critique shares concerns with both Keller and Jenkins (see fn. 47 above). Like Jenkins I find resources for an environmentally responsive and responsible creation ethic in Gen. 2, but like Keller I find Barth's account to be troubled by aversion to maternal imagery and his construction of female human agency. I agree with Jenkins's argument about the significance of Barth's reading of Gen. 2 (which Keller does not address), however, by attributing Barth's aversion to maternal-divine imagery simply to his rejection of Nazi ideology, Jenkins overlooks the deeply problematic assumptions (and anxieties) embedded both in Barth's rejection of maternal imagery and the parallel they find in his construction of a subordinated female agency. Thus while Jenkins is right to note Barth's embrace of watery and generative imagery in Gen. 2, he does not note Barth's continued refusal to associate the earth from which Adam arises with the womb, and so Barth does not appear as ready to associate the creaturely

Barth locates the divine likeness [*Gottebenbildlichkeit*] of the human being (Gen. 1:26-31) in the relationship between the male and female, noting that he here follows insights from Vischer and Bonhoeffer (194).⁵¹ In order to recognize the revelatory character of Barth's account

generativity of Gen. 2 with feminine imagery (i.e. wombs) as Jenkins is. Whatever we make of Barth's understanding of the co-activity of water, earth, and plants in the company of Adam, it is too hasty to see Barth here embracing feminine imagery. Most significantly for my purposes, in his appreciation of Barth's interest in creaturely agency, Jenkins does not recognize that the only overtly female creature in Barth's reading of Gen. 2 is rendered distinctly female precisely in her inactivity. Barth notes that she says and does nothing at all in this scene. Next to the many actors of Gen. 2 Eve is strikingly immobile. I will suggest in my next chapter that the wordless Eve of Gen. 2 must be set alongside the rejected-by-the-Word "Spirit of *Elohim*" in Genesis 1.2, which "hovers and broods" over chaos "impotently because wordlessly" (III/1, 108). A forceful point in Keller's argument is the close connection she sees between an abjected feminine divine (in all its impotent activity) and a silenced female agency. The God who rejects this wordless possibility of being will find his likeness in an Adam who seeks, chooses, and speaks for and on behalf of an impotent-because-wordless Eve. In other words. I will argue that when it comes to the generativity of female bodies and the activity of female subjects, Barth stumbles repeatedly. He does not appear to be able to incorporate his construal of feminine "difference" into his understanding of creaturely materiality and the creaturely agency that in Adam becomes paradigmatically male. Where female agency arises it must be subdued, like chaos, into the silent Eve whose choice is to let Adam choose for her. To simply attribute Barth's effacement of maternal imagery to his aversion to Nazi ideology risks overlooking these troubled assumptions about female bodies and female agencies, which are always plagued by a distinctive passivity that demarcates them from Barth's understanding of human agency. Keller's critique shows that for Barth maternal generativity is antithetical to God's generativity. I thus share with Keller the criticism that Barth's abjection of maternal imagery appears driven by a male fantasy of paternal reproduction without the need of the active/generative contribution of a third party.

⁵¹ Barth departs from both Luther and Calvin when he follows Bonhoeffer's and Vischer's new approach to the imago Dei. In his Commentary on Gen. 1:26-27, Luther gives to the image of God in the unfallen Adam a holistic reach, for it entails an excellence in physical and mental capacities that enabled him to rule the animals. While Luther allows that Eve was also made in the image of God, he declares that she did not possess the glory and prestige of Adam, and he evokes as analogy the moon's lesser excellence in relation to the Sun (*Luther's Works*, Vol. 1, *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5*, trans. George V. Schick [Saint Louis: Concordia, 1958], 55-70). While Calvin connects the capacity for relationship with God to the imago Dei he does not connect it to the free fellowship between the sexes in the way that Barth does. See Susan E. Schreiner (*The Theater of his Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* [Durham, NC: Labyrinth, 1991], 65-7) for a discussion of Calvin's view of the imago Dei. She writes that for Calvin the image of God is the original order in the soul and the relationship whereby Adam refers his excellence to the exceptional gifts bestowed on him by his God. Adam's soul is rightly ordered so that will follows reason, affections are kept in bound, and reason is capable of knowing and loving God, and Adam is able to ascend to God through the contemplation of nature. But after the Fall, itself the consequence of the subversion of order, humans no longer refer their excellence to God and consequently no longer perceive God in nature, and so the relational character of the imago Dei is destroyed. For while mind and will remain active the fallen mind, driven by a sense of divinity, tries to find knowledge of its creator but fixates instead on creaturely idols, for it is no longer capable of finding God through nature. The fallen will is enslaved to sin, it cannot move toward the good, and so its movement is always toward a choice of evil. Yet remnants of the image of God remain after the Fall, acting as a bridle or restraint against chaos. In the civil realm, it is evident in the natural fear humans have toward rulers, and occasionally it has a positive function evident in the instincts of nature through which humans propagate the race, raise children, even recognize the imago Dei or a common human nature in their neighbor (95).

Barth makes explicit his affinity with Vischer and Bonhoeffer on the imago Dei, and he finds that Bonhoeffer comes closest to his own view of the text (III/1, 194-6). He also notes that he is saying something more than Vischer and Bonhoeffer when he finds the sexual difference to be the only genuine distinction between human beings (III/1, 196). The Old Testament scholar Wilhelm Vischer was a close friend of Barth and was pastor of his

(and its affinity to his account of the neighbor in §18) it is important to understand the precise way in which Barth envisions the relationship between the sexes as a copy of the image of God. This human being-in-relation is not itself identical to the image of God (a status Barth reserves solely for Christ), but rather it is a likeness, a reflection, an analogy, a sign of that image. As such it corresponds to the image of God, but only as it is divinely enabled to do so (197). As with all creaturely signs, its revelatory function does not rest in an innate capacity, for Barth does not want to reproduce a natural theology. To avoid doing so, Barth has much to say about where this divine-likeness does *not* reside. He repeatedly insists that the divine likeness⁵² resides in no

church and a neighbor from 1936 onward (Sellinger, *Charlotte von Kirschbaum*, 135). Barth's influence on him is evident in his reading of the Old Testament's relation to the New Testament and Christ. Vischer locates the imago Dei of Gen. 1 in the direct relationship between God and the human being, and he uses I/thou terminology to describe it. He sees an irreversible I/thou relationship between Creator and creature, with a transcendent God whose desire for a thou culminates in the human made in God's image. Like Barth, Vischer notes that in Gen. 2 the human being is distinguished from the animals by the intimacy with which God breathes life into Adam (see Wilhelm Vischer, *The Witness of the Old Testament to Christ*, Vol. 1, *The Pentateuch*, trans. by A. B. Crabtree [London: Lutterworth Press, 1949], esp. 47-59). Vischer also finds in Adam's need of a neighbor in Eve an analogue to God's need of Adam. Interestingly, unlike Barth he evokes the 2 commandments (love of God and love of neighbor) to support this point. It is surprising that Barth does not follow his lead on this point, especially given all the work these two commandments do for Barth in his first discussion of the neighbor in §18, and the role it will play in his depiction of human fellowship in §45. Vischer speaks of the equality of the male and female and does not attempt to subordinate the latter to the former, and he too evokes Song of Songs 2: 26, in order to show the reciprocal character of their relation. Unlike Barth he moves on to a discussion of the Fall, but when recounting Eve's role and the curse on her, he does not discuss her role in terms of her gender, nor does he discuss her changed relationship to her husband after the curse. He only discusses her pain in childbirth but is more concerned to show how grace is entailed in the delight and joy of motherhood (52-64). Dietrich Bonhoeffer (*Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3* [New York: MacMillan, 1959]) likewise does not share Barth's concern to subordinate Eve to Adam. Bonhoeffer, like Barth, insists the imago Dei is not something the human being possesses but is given by God. Bonhoeffer names it freedom for the other, resembling Barth very closely here. Human freedom for God is expressed in freedom for the other human creature. Bonhoeffer does not find a hierarchy in sexual difference, nor does he explicitly attempt to privilege the male position in any way, even though he invokes Eph. 5 to set the relation between men and women in an analogy to Christ's relation to the Church (35-39). Bonhoeffer's reading of Gen. 2 also has resemblances to Barth's. Bonhoeffer explicitly notes that Adam presents a position we can access, and that he is to disturb us as our critic (57). Bonhoeffer genders the dead earth linking it to the womb (46, 54), a troubling alignment that Barth avoids in his aversion to maternal imagery. Bonhoeffer explicitly compares Adam's receipt of the breath of life to the sacrament of Christ's body and blood, noting that this breathing of the Spirit into the human distinguishes the human body from all non-human bodies. Adam is created as a body, and therefore also redeemed as a body, in Christ and in the sacrament (47-8). While Bonhoeffer does not explicitly subordinate Eve to Adam, Barth does more to humble the exalted Adam than Bonhoeffer does.

⁵² In translating image and likeness, Barth notes that he prefers "Urbild und Vorbild," instead of the usual translations, "Bild und Gleichnis" or "Bild und Ähnlichkeit" (197/221). But in his exposition of this phrase he indicates his preference to speak of the human being's *Gottebenbildlichkeit* [divine likeness], explaining that "Man is not created to be the image [*Bilde*] of God but-as is said in vv. 26 and 27, but also in Gen. 51...in correspondence

attribute or characteristic that the human being possesses, and he thus rejects both dominant and marginal interpretations: the divine likeness is not located in the soul, the intellect, the spiritual faculties of memory, intellect, and love, in moral integrity, in holiness, in a Hegelian spiritual actualization, in physical form or appearance, or in dominion (192-7).⁵³ Barth rejects Gunkel's

with the image of God [*entsprechend dem Bilde Gottes*]. His divine likeness [*Gottebenbildlichkeit*] is never his possession, but consists wholly in the intention and deed of his Creator, whose will concerning him is this correspondence" (197/222; see 198/223, 200/224 for just a few examples of his preference for speaking of *Gottebenbildlichkeit*): "For an understanding of the general biblical use of this concept, it is advisable to keep as close as possible to the simple sense of "God-likeness" [*Gottebenbildlichkeit*] given in this passage. It is not a quality of man. Hence there is no point in asking in which of man's peculiar attributes and attitudes it consists. It does not consist in anything that man is or does. It consists as man himself consists as the creature of God. He would not be man if he were not the image [*Ebenbild*] of God. He is the image [*Ebenbild*] of God in the fact that he is man" (184/206).

⁵³ Gunnlaugur A. Jónsson, *Image of God*, 67-8: Jónsson notes that Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Wilhelm Vischer, both deeply influenced by Barth and his dialectical colleagues, advanced an interpretation of the imago Dei as inter-human relationship in the early 1930s which in turn influenced Barth. Jónsson's book follows a trajectory of interpretations of the imago Dei of Gen. 1:27ff, that includes its relational interpretation as articulated by Barth, Vischer and Bonhoeffer. He observes that one consequence of the impact of Darwin's theory of evolution (*Origin of Species* in 1859 and especially *The Descent of Man* in 1871) within Old Testament scholarship was a heightened interest in explaining Gen. 1:27ff specifically in terms of what distinguishes the human being from other animals. Scholars responded to Darwin's emphasis on the "community of descent" in humans and animals, the bodily resemblances among humans and animals, and his claim of no fundamental difference between human and higher mammals in their mental faculties (23). The dominant interpretation was to associate the imago Dei with spiritual qualities, specifically mental endowments (especially from 1882-1928), although the specific qualities varied (43). Against this back drop Bonhoeffer's, Vischer's, and Barth's association of the imago Dei with human relationship was one innovation among a number of others. In the late 19th century Gunkel and Nöldeke suggested a new approach, in which the imago Dei referred to the external resemblance of the human body to the form of the deity, and this interpretation helped them account for the strong anthropomorphism's of the narratives (Gunkel had a romantic interest in primitive notions and traditions lying behind the final form of the texts) (44-54). A predecessor to the interpretation forwarded by Barth, Brunner, and Vischer was advanced at the turn of century by Riedel (1902), who (like Vischer later on) claimed the imago Dei was the capacity of the human being and God to maintain a relationship—each can talk to the other and understand the other; he thus linked the imago Dei with the religious disposition. This approach only gained influence with Brunner, Vischer, and Barth (59-60). A less influential interpretation associated the imago Dei with the rule of humans over creatures, paralleling God's over creation (i.e. Holzinger), a largely ignored approach from 1919-1960 (59-60). Jónsson's research shows that by Barth's time the imago Dei was a contentious hermeneutical point for theologians and biblical scholars, and a key concern was with how to distinguish human beings from and elevate them above animals. As I noted in my previous chapter, the imago Dei was a point of concern for Brunner in his debate with Barth, and Barth sought to undermine Brunner's use of it to support a natural theology. The revelatory features of Barth's III/1 interpretation of the imago Dei, that I highlight here, indicate his continued interest in denying any recourse to a natural theology detachable from Christ's life story: Christ is the imago Dei, and human relationality is the divine likeness to it, but it must be divinely enabled to have this revelatory capacity, just as the human words of ecclesial discourse (another mode of I/thou human relationality) must be divinely enabled to become mediums of divine self-disclosure. Barth does not appear overly preoccupied with using his discussion of divine likeness to distinguish and elevate human beings above the animals (especially when compared to Vischer and Bonhoeffer); in fact he makes a point of noting that it is associated with sexual difference, a feature that humans share with animals (and hence requires divine activity to enable it to point beyond itself to Christ the imago Dei). Furthermore his exegesis of Gen. 1-2 frequently aims to restrain overly aggrandizing claims about the status of the human creature.

physiological interpretation of the imago Dei, thus refusing any associate of divine likeness with physical attributes, and he separates the divine command to be fruitful and multiply from his account of divine likeness.⁵⁴ He declares: “It is not a quality of man. Hence there is no point in asking in which of man's peculiar attributes and attitudes it consists. *It does not consist in anything that man is or does*” (184, my italics). Rather it resides instead in something God must repeatedly enable the human being to do.

Barth describes the divine likeness in the same terms he favors for depicting the proper orientation of the human subject toward the divine subject. Divine-likeness resides in the human subject's hearing and responding to an address, becoming a Thou when confronted by an I.⁵⁵ Since Barth consistently depicts this relational activity, this proper mode of human subjectivity (a proper hearing and responding), as something that requires divine enabling, he can declare that divine likeness is not something possessed but something that God must continually re-gift. As

⁵⁴ Barth states that Gen. 1:26-31 does not attend to the body any more than it does to the soul, intellect, or spiritual nature of the human being (194). For it to function as a revelatory sign for Barth, it must have no capacity in itself to point to Christ, hence he works to detach the divine likeness from human capacities and faculties.

⁵⁵ Selinger follows an evolution in Barth's view of the imago Dei: In *Göttingen Dogmatics* and *CD* 1 he discusses it in relation to other issues and has a largely conventional configuration in terms of creative activity of human dominion over the world (*Göttingen Dogmatics*, 163 and *Christliche Dogmatik*, 372). In *CD* I/2, 193-4 he does not find super/sub-ordination present until after the Fall. Beginning in III/1 his overall account remains consistent, but he now introduces the sexually differentiated, hierarchically ordered relation into his discussion (*Charlotte von Kirschbaum*, 116-20). Selinger is especially interested in the role von Kirschbaum played in this evolution. Barth does not mention von Kirschbaum in III/1 when he cites Vischer and Bonhoeffer as sources for his new reading. However, Selinger argues that von Kirschbaum was an important influence on Barth's framing of divine likeness in III/1, and she notes that Barth does name her in III/4 (1945) as an authority on the imago Dei as an I/Thou relation between man and woman, and he refers to her *Die wirkliche Frau* (1949) in particular (91-2). Selinger suspects that von Kirschbaum contributed to the new content Barth gives the imago in III/1, while her version is developed within a theological framework she acquired from Barth over a long period of time. She suggests that the two were mutually indebted to each other as they appropriated ideas within the movement of dialogical personalism of the 1920s and 1930s, especially as found in Buber's foundational work and developed by Brunner, Gogarten, and Bonhoeffer and Vischer in particular. Because Barth makes no use of this resource prior to III/1 (and it does not arise in his view of imago Dei articulated in *CD* I), Selinger wonders if von Kirschbaum brought this material to his attention, in her role as research assistant (89-92). She notes that von Kirschbaum's version gives greater attention to the doctrine of the imago and gives significant attention to Marian theology (92), which renders all the more conspicuous Barth's silence on Mary (which I note especially in my next chapter's attention to Barth's figural reading of Adam).

we saw in §18, the proper orientation toward God is reflected in the proper orientation toward one's human neighbor, and this orientation requires divine enabling.

As an addressed "thou" and responding "I", ordered from and to the human other, the human subject's orientation to the other has its analogue in the "the true confrontation and reciprocity" of God's inter-trinitarian life and the human's relationship to God.⁵⁶

But what is the original [*Urbild*] in which, or the prototype [*Vorbild*] according to which, man was created? We have argued already that it is the relationship and differentiation between the I and the Thou in God Himself. Man [*Mensch*] is created by God in correspondence with this relationship and differentiation in God Himself: created as a Thou that can be addressed by God but also as an I responsible to God; in the relationship of man and woman [*im Verhältnis von Mann und Frau*] in which man [*Mensch*] is a Thou to his fellow [*des anderen Menschen*] and therefore himself an I in responsibility to this claim. (198/222)

Divine likeness resides in that relationship wherein the human being is constituted as a "Thou" and an "I" when recognizing and responding to divine and human addresses. It is a revelatory event, divinely enabled, in which the human subject becomes a copy of the divine "prototype." In Barth's reading of Genesis 2, this construal of divine likeness as a divine act on the human being becomes clearer, a point I take up in my next chapter. Adam is conformed to the image of God when he is divinely enabled to recognize and properly respond to God's gift of Eve, his neighbor-"Thou": as he freely accepts and affirms what God has chosen for him and given to him in Eve. Barth depicts Adam's recognition and naming of Eve as a response to a revelatory event. From the vantage point of this creation scene it will become even clearer why Barth claims here that the image of God is nothing the human is, possess, or does.

While in §18 Barth uses this account of intersubjective relationships (together with its revelatory function) to unsettle fixed ethnic differences, in §41 he uses it to secure sexual

⁵⁶ Later on in discussing the creation of Eve, Barth will speak of the gifting of the human neighbor as follows: "In virtue of his nature man must be formally prepared for grace. This takes place as he is not left alone but is given a creaturely helpmeet. It can happen only in one way—he must be given this helpmeet" (290).

difference as *the one* structural difference dividing human beings, and in the process he continues to signal his concern to relativize ethnic difference:

But between this God and the man who thus corresponds to Him there exists-and we have to emphasise this point by way of supplement to Vischer and Bonhoeffer-a unique relationship in organic creation to the extent that among plants and the different animals of land, air and water, as is continually underlined, there are different groups and species, but that this is not the case among men, so that in relation to other organic creatures man is an *ens sui generis*, and the distinction of sexes found in man too is the only genuine distinction between man and man, in correspondence to the fact that the I-Thou relationship is the only genuine distinction in the one divine being. (197/220-1)

In its function as the divine likeness, sexual difference shares the features Barth gives to the material media of a revelatory sign, whether those signs be biblical language, creedal language, or the neighbor of §18. In Barth's understanding of revelation, mundane creaturely media become something more than they have in themselves the capacity to be, when God specifically selects them and enables them to point beyond themselves to Christ.⁵⁷ This sort of understanding of signification and its efficacy is at work in Barth's view of sexual difference.

The preceding quotation suggests that Barth has in view the anti-semitic arguments in which ethnic difference is as much a given as sexual difference. He seeks in Genesis 1 a warrant to accept the givenness of the latter while refusing the givenness of the former. However Barth does not explain what marks or distinguishes the sexes. This is something he will consistently refuse to do in his future discussions. He avoids resorting to scientific discourses, gender typologies and social conventions to describe the difference. If he is assuming that physiological markers or reproductive functions have a part to play in this givenness, he does not mention them or attempt to give them theological significance. Instead his discussion of sexual difference centers on the recognition and acceptance of the divine gift in the human other.

⁵⁷ "It is not in something which distinguishes him from the beasts, but in that which formally he has in common with them, viz. that God has created him male and female, that he is this being in differentiation and relationship, and therefore in natural fellowship with God" (185).

CONCLUSION

In Chapter 1, I noted that in his prolegomenon volume (*CD I*) Barth both describes and performs a mode of subjectivity that he finds modeled in biblical authors and in the characters they construct. In this performance Barth leads his reader in a dogmatic practice aimed at unlearning habits of modern thinking that Barth finds deeply problematic. In the current chapter I have shown that Barth continues this formative exercise in his doctrine of creation. He positions himself as a proclaimer of faith in God's creative work: along with all who confess faith in the Creator, he hears, is taught by, and then re-describes the biblical witnesses to Christ, summarized in the Apostle's Creed. This dogmatic subject is always in motion, seeking to hear afresh those voices, continually declaring what he has heard, and always hoping to have heard properly. At the same time, Barth wants the reader to remember that this subject is always dependent on divine revelatory activity for its hearing to be a hearing of the Word in human words, and its speaking to be a speaking of the Word in human words. Barth continues (as he did in his prolegomenon) to construct for his readers a number of biblical models of this confessional and dogmatic practice. Barth imitates these models in the hope that they are imposed on him from without, in the hope that he has heard and recognized in biblical voices something more than his own projections and constructions.

In the next chapter Adam will serve as a biblical model for such a confessional practice. Notably, Eve will be a silent motionless medium for Adam. Adam recognizes God's gift (and his own reflection) in a human being who does not speak or act when serving this revelatory function. Gendered assumptions will complicate Barth's picture of human agency. Adam will be the paradigm for this always dependent yet continually seeking, hearing, and confessing subject. Adam will perform his hearing and confession on behalf of (and instead of) a silent motionless

female who provides the occasion for his first free and responsible act. Eve will appear as a truncated version of Barth's normative model of human agency.

In this chapter I have argued that assumptions about passivity are deeply implicated in Barth's aversion to maternal imagery. While his rejection of maternal imagery is implicated in his rejection of the valorization of maternity and myth in Nazi and German Christian ideology, I have argued that this alone does not fully explain what is at stake theologically in Barth's rejection of maternal imagery within the text. Whatever maternity might be or evoke for Barth (he devotes as few words as possible to it), I have suggested that on the one hand the maternal body is too capable of generating life for Barth to allow its association with any materiality that God uses in God's creative activity. We will continue to see this in his reading of Genesis 2, especially at the points where he departs from Bonhoeffer and Vischer, who both attempt to positively incorporate maternal imagery into their readings. On the other hand the maternal body is too passive in its generative activity for Barth to allow maternal imagery to be associated with the God's creative activity. At best it appears as an impotent masculine generativity. Paternal imagery better lends itself to this service for Barth, who seems at times to resort to the fantasy of patrilineal reproduction without need of a maternal third party. He thus finds the Old Testament hope for a messiah secured in a patrilineal genealogy that he describes as if it could proceed without the intervention or need of maternal bodies (169-71; 198-9). However, as we will see in the next chapter, Barth does secure a place for creaturely fecundity and co-activity, although he will continue to disassociate that activity from maternal imagery.

I have foregrounded the revelatory character of sexual difference in its function as the divine likeness of the *imago Dei* (Jesus Christ). While the distinction between the sexes is a mundane feature that human beings share with animals, it is divinely selected to do what it

cannot in itself accomplish. This will become clearer in Barth's discussion of Adam's naming of Eve. As the human agent accepts and responds to the divine gift of the sexually differentiated neighbor-Thou, he is conformed to the image of Christ. I have noted Barth's reticence in describing the distinction between the sexes. As important as it is to Barth that the neighbor-Thou be someone of the opposite sex, Barth says as little as he possibly can about what he imagines distinguishes the sexes, and he will remain silent on this point in his future discussions of the topic. In order to resist what he finds problematic in the orders of creation framework and other natural theologies, he seeks to locate sexual difference strictly within an ecclesial confession of faith in the Christ to whom scriptures witness, and he makes no direct references to biological facts, observable bodily markers, scientific studies, romantic essentializations, or any particular scientific or philosophical framework. And yet he assumes an unambivalent givenness to this difference. This will remain the case in his reading of Genesis 2, where sexual difference is developed more fully as a scene of recognition and address, in which physiological markers and reproductive functions make no explicit contribution. He will continue the work he has begun in Genesis 1 of detaching sexual difference from the divine command that men and women be fruitful and multiply and from the Old Testament interest in patrilineage.

In this chapter I have shown that while Barth is eager to fix sexual difference as an irreducible difference dividing humankind, he has not forgotten his concern to subvert ethnic differences. As he sees it, ethnic differences are unstable and relative and cannot be hierarchically ordered. Because Barth continues to structure the human other as a revelatory sign that is both gift and law (a point I explore in the next chapter) he preserves the pattern of thought that he used in §18 to subvert ethnic difference, while attempting to put it to work to reify sexual difference. This will invite a subversion of his account, which I will undertake in my next

chapter. Barth's effort to detach the divine likeness of human relationships from sexual reproduction will further open his account to a reading that unsettles his reification of sexual difference as a hierarchical binary between male and female. His figural interpretation of the relationship between Adam and Eve will further expose the instability of his account of sexual difference.

CHAPTER THREE

PLAYING ADAM, SILENCING EVE: BARTH'S MODEL HUMAN AGENT

Barth's figurative exegesis of the creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2, found in *Church Dogmatics* III/1, §41.3, functions as the biblical template for Barth's theology of sexual difference, as it appears later in III/2, §45.3 and III/4, §54.1.¹ Barth's reading of Adam in particular is significant, not only for Barth's understanding of sexual difference, but also for the theological anthropology that follows in III/2. Barth presents Adam as an exemplary model of the free and responsible human agent. Adam prefigures Christ in this capacity, and Adam's agency is carefully patterned after Christ's agency.² Most notably for my purposes, Adam performs this exemplary function specifically in his recognition and naming of Eve, and so Barth's account of sexual difference is framed in the revelatory, agential, intersubjective, and dialogical terms that I have foregrounded as features of the ethical framework he used in §18 to override anthropologies constructed from natural theologies and orders of creation.

In this chapter I will argue that when Barth uses Genesis 2 to order the relationship between male and female agents, his model of subjectivity becomes paradigmatically male. Seeking, deciding, and choosing become a male prerogative when the context is the male subject's relationship to his female other. This is a recurring move in III/2 and III/4, whenever sexual difference is in view. Yet Barth will continue to insist that women are fully functioning

¹ In this chapter, quotations and references to *Church Dogmatics* III/1 are cited in the body of the main text, without reference to volume and part-volume. When referring to other part-volumes, volume number and part-volume number will precede the page number. The first page number refers to the English translation of *Church Dogmatics*. When I refer to the German original, a second page number is positioned after a forward slash. For clarity within the notes, I occasionally use the annotation *KD* when referring to the German text, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, and *CD* when referring to the English translation, *Church Dogmatics*.

² Bonhoeffer makes explicit what is implicit in Barth's reading, namely that Adam presents a position the reader can access and that he is to disturb the reader as a critic (*Creation and Fall*, 57).

agents. I will refer to Barth's reading of other scriptures where he depicts women doing all that Adam does here in Genesis 2, insofar as they (like Adam) seek, speak, elect and declare their free decision for the other. At points he presents their speech as examples of what theological speech ought to be. Barth's description of sexual difference and the relationship between the sexes is, therefore, plagued by his effort to maintain the complete humanity of women as fully functioning agents while nevertheless securing some sort of agential prerogative for men that consequently diminishes and restrains female agency. My aim in this and the following chapters is to expose this tension in order to argue that, if women are to be fully functioning agents as Barth insists, then his model of human agency itself resists his efforts to subordinate and restrain the ways in which women relate to men. In the current chapter I seek to rescue Barth's model agent from his own efforts to gender it by pointing to patterns in Adam's relationship to multiple sites of creaturely alterity that resist Barth's efforts to construct a subordinate, silent female other.

Much of what is problematic in Barth's description of the relation between men and women in *Church Dogmatics* III/2 and III/4 is already embedded in this reading of Genesis 2, specifically in Adam's encounter with Eve. This particular point is widely recognized by those who are critical of Barth's configuration of the relation between men and women. By locating in Barth's reading of Genesis 2 a critical corrective to Barth's ordering of sexual difference, I depart from many of the critics who find his reading too deeply flawed to be retrievable. Commentators on Barth's theology of sexual difference usually approach his exegesis of Genesis 2 retrospectively through the interpretive lens of I/Thou dialogical personalism, which he employs in his description of sexual difference in III/2, §45.2. Most give only marginal and passing attention to the narrative details in Barth's reading of the creation of Eve. Taking their

cue from Barth's discussion in III/2, §45, they assess his use of Genesis 2 as one among a series of scriptural texts that Barth deploys to locate the relationship between men and women within a chain of analogous, hierarchically ordered relationships (Yahweh and Israel, Christ and the Church, soul and body, Father and Son). They do not attend closely to the ways in which various narrative details in Barth's reading both support and resist his problematic ordering of the sexes.³

³ See Frykberg, *Karl Barth's Theological Anthropology*, 31-5; Watson, *Karl Barth's Doctrine of Man and Woman*, 7-18; Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female: A Study in Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 69-86; Fiddes, "The Status of Woman in the Thought of Karl Barth," 138-55; Green, "Karl Barth on Women and Men," 221-30; Serene Jones, "This God Which is Not One: Irigaray and Barth on the Divine," in *Transfigurations: Theology and the French Feminists*, ed. C.W. Maggie Kim, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 109-141; Campbell, "An Appraisal of Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Imago Dei in Light of his Doctrine of the Trinity"; Springs, "Gender, Equality, and Freedom in Karl Barth's Theological Anthropology," 446-77; Osborn, "Man and/or woman according to Karl Barth," 236-56; Dreyer, "Karl Barth's male-female order as asymmetrical theoethics," 1493-1521; McKelway, "Perichoretic Possibilities in Barth's Doctrine of Male and Female," 231-43; Stephenson, "The male and female interpersonal relation in Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*," 435-449.

Jewett's critique of Barth's account of sexual difference (*Man as Male and Female*, 69-86) is helpful in its focus on Barth's uses of biblical texts in all three volumes of *Church Dogmatics* to support his efforts to subordinate woman to man. He too only briefly assesses Barth's reading of Gen. 2, focusing on Barth's claim that Eve's subordination to Adam does not mean that she is inferior to Adam. Arguing that Barth cannot successfully maintain the traditional view of woman's subordination without the traditional view of woman's inferiority to man, Jewett points to the absurd logic that follows in Barth's intense efforts to insist that his reading delivers no insult to women (71-4). He observes that Barth is attempting to fight on two fronts, retaining hierarchy while rejecting a tradition that conflates hierarchy with inferiority, and "as a result the argument in his hands dies of a thousand qualifications" (82). In Barth's various appropriations of different scriptures here and especially in III/2 and III/4 it is not at all clear what subordination means for woman and superordination means for man; Barth's efforts to reverse the negative implications for women results in emptying her subordination of any meaning (82-4). Jewett finds here a departure from Barth's broader view of a human fellowship of equals under God. A marital relationship of mutual partnership in life is in far better keeping with Barth's broader insights, but ambiguity and inconsistencies result in his efforts to maintain female subordination without acknowledging the traditional theological grounds on which this was grounded, namely the superiority of the man as the image and glory of God in whom reason predominates (85). My critique resonates with Jewett's arguments here. However, by following Barth's model agent, Adam, through the plot of Gen. 2, I expose the precise points at which he departs from a reading that would have maintained this fellowship of equals (thus one that would have resembled his reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan). It also enables me to situate his view of female subordination within his framework of a human agent that seeks, desires and chooses what God has chosen and gifted to it. Within this framework I argue that his view of female subordination comes into view more clearly in what it lacks in relation to male agency. Here we see, with Jewett, the sort of inconsistencies that result from trying to have it both ways: Barth will use Eve's narrative silence and inactivity to support his claim that she is subordinate to the seeking, desiring, choosing, and speaking Adam, but then a few pages later he will find in the Song of Songs the voice of a female agent that seeks, desires and chooses the male (yet in spite of this nevertheless remains subordinate in her responsiveness to male initiative). Thus with Jewett I agree that in trying to resist feminism and keep women in their place while maintaining their dignity Barth produces a contradictory account. He presents his reader with a model of female agency impossible for any women to enact, because the continuously-in-motion activity of the male is precisely what she must lack as a distinctively female mode of agency awaiting male initiative of the always-seeking male subject that must lead her in order to be male.

Unlike other analyses of Barth's account of sexual difference, Selinger's assessment of Barth's reading of Gen. 1-2, is primarily concerned with comparing Barth and von Kirschbaum on the relation between the sexes.

Here I join those critics, notably Elouise Fraser and Eugene Rogers, who give careful attention to Barth's reading of the Genesis 2 narrative. Fraser and Rogers seek resources from within Barth's theology for critiquing and dismissing the role Barth's reading of Genesis 2 plays in his theological anthropology, because heteronormativity (Rogers) and the hierarchical ordering of the relation between men and women (Fraser) is so central to Barth's retelling of the narrative. By focusing on the ways in which Adam functions for Barth as a model of human agency, I argue instead that Barth's reading of Genesis 2 actually provides its own resources for unsettling and re-imagining the patriarchal and heteronormative features of his theological anthropology. Fraser and Rogers overlook these resources in part because they focus specifically on the scene of Eve's creation and presentation to Adam and Barth's figural reading of it. In so doing they isolate this scene from Barth's reading of the Genesis 2 narrative as a whole, and thus do not give adequate attention to the type of agent that Adam is for Barth, nor his relationship of dependency and responsibility within a network of creaturely others. In his later discussions Barth encourages this sort of approach, for when summarizing this exegesis to support his account of sexual difference he too detaches his figural reading of the creation of Eve from his reading of the preceding verses of the chapter. As I shall argue, the success of his efforts to subordinate Eve to Adam rests on his elision of significant parallels in Adam's own creation from the dust of the earth.

Comparing their various accounts, Selinger focuses on their mutual interdependence in configuring the *imago Dei* in relational terms. This comparison is helpful to my project for foregrounding the significance in Barth's departures from von Kirschbaum (most notable in his silence on maternal imagery and any maternal function for female agency). Barth's III/2 description of the I/Thou relation guides Selinger's analysis, for she uses it as the conceptual key for understanding what Barth is doing in his III/1 account of sexual difference (*Charlotte von Kirschbaum*, 169-90). This retrospective critique tends to lead commentators like Selinger (and Fraser and Rogers, to be discussed below) to read the III/1, §41 exegesis strictly in terms of what it lacks (the activity of a female subject as both Thou and I), while neglecting the ways in which Barth configures Eve and other creaturely entities as signs of God's grace that impose an obligation on Adam—calling him to the free decision that confirms God's decision for him. I will argue that Barth's understanding of human freedom in relation to divine activity is key for understanding the full implications of Eve's lack and for exposing alternatives that Barth might have taken that would have allowed her to be a fully functioning agent like Adam.

Like others, Fraser and Rogers approach Barth's exegesis of Genesis 2 through the lens of dialogical personalism that Barth fleshes out in III/2, §45.2. There Barth claims that human fellowship is fully realized only where there is a mutual seeing, speaking, hearing and assisting between self and other. Using Barth's descriptive criteria for I/Thou relations, Fraser and Rogers argue that Barth errs by enlisting Genesis 2 to illustrate the inter-human I/Thou relationship, for there is no dialogical exchange between Adam and Eve in Genesis 2. As we saw in my previous chapter, Barth links the imago Dei of Genesis 1, with the encounter and confrontation between a sexually differentiated I and Thou. Yet as these critics point out and Barth himself observes (III/1, 300), the scene of encounter between Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 is not an I/Thou dialogical exchange between two human subjects, for Adam alone speaks. These critics therefore argue that this creation scene cannot serve as the normative example for relationships between men and women that Barth intends. For Fraser and Rogers, then, Barth's very selection of Genesis 2 is in itself problematic because it does not provide an example of the sort of human I/Thou exchange Barth describes in III/2. They direct readers to egalitarian narratives that depict the I/Thou exchange missing in Genesis 2, narratives that do not lend themselves so readily to Barth's patriarchal (Fraser) and heteronormative (Rogers) framing of human fellowship.⁴

⁴ Elouise Fraser and Eugene Rogers are both friendly critics of Barth who give careful attention to his reading of the creation of Eve in Gen. 2. I share with them a particular interest in the way narrative detail and plot function to support Barth's dogmatic exposition (Fraser, "Karl Barth's Doctrine of Humanity; Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body*). However they also approach the narrative through the interpretive framework of dialogical personalism developed later in III/2 (like the many others noted above). From this later vantage point, they appreciate the reciprocal and mutual framework of III/2, §45.2 as it details the I/Thou exchange in non-gendered terms: a mutual seeing, speech and hearing, rendering of acts of assistance, all done with gladness. They use this account's mutuality to resist the super-/subordering that the I/Thou relation takes in §45.3, where Barth depicts the husband and wife dyad as the paradigmatic I/Thou relationship, in which the man leads, inspires, initiates (and at points is said to command) and the woman follows and obeys. They argue that Barth's selection of the relation between Adam and Eve in Gen. 2 as the paradigm for the relation between the sexes is itself a flawed decision, for from the lens of §45.2, the scene of Eve's creation does not present an I/Thou exchange between male and female, and so it cannot serve to subordinate the female to the male as Barth attempts to make it do so. Only in Gen. 3 do we see Adam and Eve interacting, and with disastrous results.

Rogers and Fraser suggest alternate biblical narratives for a model of I/Thou relation in keeping with §45.2 and without the gender hierarchy of §45.3. Rogers provides a number of same-sex models, and Fraser draws on the

In my own critical intervention into Barth's construction of sexual difference I too will draw on Barth's interpretation of other biblical narratives in order to unsettle the patriarchal and heteronormative framing of human fellowship. But first, I will argue that his reading of Genesis 2 as a whole has its own rich resources for undermining some of the problematic interpretive moves he makes when introducing Eve. These resources are overlooked when commentators begin with the scene of Eve's creation and evaluate it in terms of what it lacks when compared to the I/Thou relation of III/2, §45.2. Barth situates Adam in a network of relationships to multiple sites of creaturely alterity, and these others (earth, mist, river, plants, and finally Eve) all function as divine gifts to Adam and signs of what he himself ought to be and do. I will argue that Barth's construal of these others (Eve in particular) as gifts and signs of divine grace, is open to a reading and reconstruction that neither privileges the male agent nor asserts a heteronormative paradigm for all human relationships.

To support this claim, I will draw on Barth's earlier reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan, to which my first chapter was devoted. Barth's reading of the parable will enable me to tease out the features of these creaturely others (Eve in particular) that are also operative in Barth's earlier sacramental configuration of the neighbor. Barth construes Eve as a sign of God's gracious aid that imposes an obligation on Adam (a sign of both gospel and law), and in this respect she has much in common with the Good Samaritan, who is a sign of Christ, representing

gospel narratives of Jesus. I share with these two commentators the view that Gen. 2 is an inadequate example of the I/Thou relationship that Barth later describes. However, in focusing on the model of agency that Adam provides in Barth's reading of Gen. 2 as a whole, I find resources within this narrative itself for an alternative construal of the relation between Adam and Eve. Rogers has good reasons for wanting to bypass and decenter Gen. 2 altogether, for it functions to support Barth's heteronormative construal of inter-human alterity, especially later on in *CD* III. But I will show that for all Barth's unquestionably overt heteronormativity, he has done much (inadvertently) to support a detachment of sexual difference and desire from the sort of bodily markers and reproductive ends that would demand the reader to line up on either side of an oppositional divide. I will expose the instability of his efforts to fix sexual difference, and I will argue that Adam might readily serve as a model for an agential site all might occupy in relation to a human other, regardless of how the differences of that other might be constructed. I will argue that in its function as both gift and obligation, this human other can serve to resist and unsettle gender constructs, just as Barth used it to unsettle ethnic constructs in §18.

both the divine gift and the divine obligation. So while Barth explicitly secures only Adam as a sign of Christ, Eve shares with the Good Samaritan the same features and can thereby serve as such a sign, although Barth will never admit as much. Barth's reading of the parable will thus assist me in imagining how Barth might have interpreted this scene of encounter between Adam and Eve, had he not been so bent on securing some sort of agential prerogative for men.

I will argue that the parable of the Good Samaritan exposes an interpretive path that Barth did not take: one in which the needy lonely Adam, like the fallen Israelite, is a mirror in which any might recognize themselves (regardless of ethnicity or sexual difference). In Eve they might recognize that human neighbor (regardless of sex or ethnic difference) who embodies the divine gift of fellowship and imposes the obligation to imitate that neighborly fellowship. Barth, of course, does not present Adam in this way. Instead, as a sexually-delineated subject position, Barth's Adam is to be appropriated only by the male. However, §18 suggests a different reading in which Adam might mirror a subject-position that is open to all. The problem will be Barth's notably inanimate Eve. I will argue that her immobility is a departure from Barth's interpretive pattern of construing the creaturely entities of Genesis 2 as "actors" in a variety of modalities. Here we will see again that assumptions about female passivity trouble his reading of the creation narratives.⁵ In supporting this argument, §18 and §41 provide fuel for my internal critique of Barth's ordering and delimiting of sexual difference later on in III/2 and III/4.⁶

⁵ The critical and reconstructive aims of my analysis in this chapter have much in common with Graham Ward's discussion of sexual difference in Barth's theology ("The Erotics of Redemption," 52-72). Ward's analysis is situated within the framework of Barth's doctrine of the Trinity and §45 and §54; he only briefly touches on Barth's reading of Gen. 1-2. My analysis of Barth's exegesis shares with Ward a debt to Butler and Irigaray. I share Ward's suspicions that: 1) Barth has reified naturalistic observations and premises in his account of sexual difference; 2) Barth does not succeed in providing an account of sexual difference but instead produces an economy of the same in which woman serves the narcissistic project of reflecting the man's image; 3) Barth's reading of the Adam and Eve scene of recognition enacts this economy; 4) sexual difference remains an unstable site for Barth as it acquires its theological significance within a chain of analogical relations. Ward finds resources for a critical corrective to Barth's account of sexual difference in an alternate economy of desire that he finds at play in Barth's doctrine of the Trinity. There, encounter with alterity is expressed in a kenotic outpouring of self-giving love that exposes the

problematic character of the economy of desire enacted by Adam: an economy based on lack, demand, and possession. Ward wants a single erotic economy that is not plagued by notions of complementarity and hierarchy, and one that is open to same-sex erotic partnerships. I share with Ward these aims and concerns and agree with his criticism of the scene of recognition between Adam and Eve. However, I argue that up until this particular scene of Gen. 2, Adam has modeled, for Barth, a mode of subjectivity that actually participates in the sort of economy of excess and self-giving that Ward finds within the Trinity. For example, Adam recognizes in the outpouring of Eden's river a sign of the service he must play to creation. It is on the arrival of a female other that Barth's economy seizes up. The overflowing service that Adam sees reflected in the activity of the river becomes self-serving as Adam finds in the static silent Eve a motionless mirror to reflect his own agential precedence and to secure his own godlike prerogative over another creature.

⁶ Christopher Roberts (*The Significance of Sexual Difference in the Moral Theology of Marriage*, [139-164; 186-219] defends Barth's account of sexual difference against Ward's (see fn. 5) and Roger's criticisms (see fn. 4). Barth's reading of Gen. 1-2 plays an important role in Roberts's defense. Roberts's use of this exegesis exposes the need for an internal critique of Barth's exegesis of Gen. 1-2 in reconstructive projects like my own that he opposes. However, Roberts's reading of Barth (like Ward's and Roger's) does not attend to Barth's full exegesis of Gen. 2, but only to those moments that address the relation between men and women (the imago Dei verses of Gen. 1 and the scene of Eve's creation in Gen. 2). Furthermore, his reading comes to rest too heavily on what he assumes must be Barth's own assumptions about the biological differentiation of the male and the female.

Roberts's book is written with the same-sex marriage debate directly in view. His stated intent is to look to the tradition of Western Christian theological reflection to secure the theological significance of sexual difference. He distinguishes "sexual difference" from social constructions of gender by linking it to "biological difference," and he states, "I will usually, but not always, concentrate on whether and how the biological difference between male and female has or has not mattered in moral theology about marriage" (7). He finds Barth to be a resource for giving theological meaning to "biological difference." This is surprising because, as I argue in Chs. 2-5 (and as Roberts himself appears to recognize) Barth's central frame of reference for describing the difference between the sexes is not "biological" or physiological markers, or reproductive functions or roles, but rather the agential scene of recognition and address. Barth's account does not lend itself readily to the sort of sex-gender division that Roberts is using. Roberts admits that Barth does not explain or describe precisely what sexual difference entails, that he does not want to express the difference in terms of biological functions, social roles or complementary essences, and that Barth does not tell us what exactly sexual difference is other than that it entails some sort of precedence and subsequence. He does not appear to recognize that it is this reticence and Barth's explicit efforts to detach the theological significance of the relation between men and women from sexual reproduction that open Barth's account to critical reconstructions like my own, Ward's, and Roger's.

While Roberts recognizes that Barth gives no clear explanation for what sexual difference entails and that Barth does not reduce it to physiological markers or reproductive functions, when Roberts turns a few chapters later to defend Barth against Ward's critique he collapses Barth's sexual difference into his own "biological difference." Roberts faults Ward's preferred trinitarian economy of desire (and its openness to same-sex partnerships) for a re-appropriation of Barth in which "the significance of the person's physical body disappears under so much symbolism, as if human materiality were indifferent to God's theological purposes." Ward however is appealing to the symbolic and figural strategies that Barth himself uses, and so Roberts's criticism could readily apply to Barth's figural reading of Adam and Eve, apart from which his account of sexual difference acquires no theological meaning (as I explained in my previous chapter's description of the creation-covenant prefigural relationship). It is only through these symbolic and figural strategies that Barth can resist a natural theology that detaches God's creative activity from God's revelatory activity in Christ. For Barth, Eve acquires her prefigural significance in two different human collectives (the community of Israel and the community of the Church), neither of which lend meaning to any distinctive female physiology; rather they lend meaning to the subordinate place she is to take in the scene of recognition and address. Contra Ward, Roberts declares that for Barth "the biological differences between the sexes mean something" and that "for Barth, biology was the material presupposition for the covenant." The latter statement suggests a misunderstanding on Roberts's part of what the creation-covenant relationship is. Barth never names "biology" as the material presupposition of the covenant, but rather creation, and "creation" is a history, a sequence of divine acts that include God's production of a human actor whose own sequence of activities (seeking, recognizing, electing, and naming Eve....but notably and explicitly *not* sexually reproducing himself via Eve) are central to Barth's theological framing of sexual difference and male precedence. When defending Barth against Eugene Rogers, Roberts attends primarily to Rogers's argument that on Barth's terms, Christ is not fully human

In his reading of Genesis 2, Barth continues his efforts to present a humbled but hopeful model of subjectivity for the (now male) reader to occupy. We will see the many strategies he uses both to humble and exalt the figure of Adam as he continues to lead his readers on a path in which they are to unlearn problematic intellectual habits and assumptions. Adam is humbled in his dependence on God's provision of creaturely others and his relativity alongside them, but Adam is exalted as a sign of Christ.⁷ Divine gifting of creaturely others will be key to Barth's

because he does not, like Adam, have a human wife to complete his humanity. Roberts responds by arguing that for Barth marriage is not compulsory for human being-in-relation and that in Barth's view Christ could fully live out his humanity as a sexually differentiated but celibate male in the sense Barth has in view without ever marrying. While I agree that Barth would likely say something of this sort in response to such a critique, this in itself does not adequately address the force of Rogers's argument. As will become clearer in III/2 and III/4, human-being-in-a-sexually-differentiated-relationship will have its normative center in a monogamous relationship between a man and woman. Because Barth's anthropology must keep Christ as its central frame of reference, Barth's account rests not on the gospel narratives of how Christ lived out his life as a celibate male in the company mostly of men, but on Paul's marital metaphor of Christ and the Church. For Barth's account to work on his own christocentric terms, he must marry Christ off to some "type" of woman, and (the unmarried) Paul helps him do this. Of course, Paul's metaphor itself does not secure for Roberts a stable site of "biological difference," for Christ's bride, as a collective of many human beings, does not bear the female bodily markers or reproductive functions that Roberts seeks to secure, and neither Paul's nor Barth's use of the metaphor make appeal to such markers and functions as the point of their analogy. Roberts' polemical project of using Barth to secure a theological norm for marriage that gives theological meaning to "biological difference" is, then, a doubtful one (185-219).

Roberts praises Barth's reticence on the nature of sexual difference as an indication of epistemic restraint (145). He also attempts to soften Barth's language of male precedence, suggesting it be understood in terms of a primacy of service (as Barth himself says) (161). Roberts remains silent on Barth's more problematic language, used later in III/2 and III/4, where male precedence is a leading, commanding, inspiring initiative that the female is to follow and obey. Like many defenders of Barth who are not entirely comfortable with (or clear about) the implications of Barth's version of male privilege, Roberts reverts to Barth's own strategy for avoiding any clear explanation of what male precedence entails when he declares, with satisfaction, that for Barth, "what the content of this relationship will be, what men and women should do as they confront one another and live together, is left up to actual men and women to discover and unfold from what God has given" (144). In Barth's own words this evasive strategy is stated as follows: "What distinguishes man from woman and woman from man even in this relationship of super- and subordination is more easily discovered, perceived, respected and valued in the encounter between them than it is defined" (III/2, 287). I will return to this rather routine example of a defense of Barth's account of male privilege in the following chapters, when I address the sections of Barth's writings where most critics and defenders of his account of sexual difference focus.

⁷ In ecotheological critiques of Barth (which I discuss in Ch. 2, fn. 4) many suspect that for Barth creation is merely an instrument that enables a divine human exchange. This is a key concern for me as well, and a central and recurring question as I foreground the ways in which creaturely media reveal the grace of God embodied and enacted in Christ. It is here specifically that the sort of agency of the medium or sign as it redirects, limits, and affects the human subject, comes into question. As I noted in Ch. 1, the neighbor's activity functions to redirect the subject, unsettling its self-love and self-mastery. Here in Gen. 2, contrary to many of Barth's critics, I show that Barth's Adam finds himself in the company of creaturely co-workers (earth, water, plants and mist), who in their activities are signs pointing to God's care and at the same time reflecting what Adam himself is to be. We see these actors doing what they do without any subordination to Adam's activity: he is humbled by his dependence on them in fulfilling along with them a shared service to earth. Eve, however, is a very different matter. For while she is the

efforts to resist a model of subjectivity that is inclined to self-love in lonely isolation.⁸ However, I will show that when Barth's male subject acquires a silent immobile female partner, he recuperates some of his losses, becoming more godlike than Barth is otherwise willing to allow, as he speaks and acts for and on her behalf. Barth's reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan

neighbor-gift that God gives (Adam's companion helper), when compared to these other co-workers she is markedly immobile and inactive. In his appreciative reading of Barth, Jenkins (*Ecologies of Grace*) recognizes, and leaves unanswered, the question critics raise at this juncture: does Barth's anthropocentrism find its parallel in his androcentrism? does the problematic relation of lordship that Adam has over Eve mirror Adam's lordship and dominion over creation (178-80)? Others who criticize Barth's hierarchical understanding of human lordship as inherently violent and exploitative include Keller (*Face of the Deep*), Michael Welker (*Creation and Reality* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999]), and Jürgen Moltmann ("Schöpfung, Bund und Herrlichkeit," *Evangelische Theologie* 48 no.2 [1988]: 108-27). For a discussion of this issue see Jenkins, 178-80.

The current chapter addresses these concerns by arguing that in his construal of Eve as the silent and immobile sign of God's care, Barth departs from his more fruitful construal of creaturely agency. We see that when it comes to female bodies and female agencies Barth's view of the beneficiary activity of creaturely others is troubled by assumptions he has about a specifically female mode of agency that must always be marked by a passive reserve in a sphere of actors, human and otherwise. Thus I will agree with Barth's critics that his account does have a tendency toward instrumentalizing and objectifying the medium, and we see this especially in Eve. He needs to be pushed further than his own more productive view of creaturely co-actors goes, toward an account that allows the subject to be continually unsettled, redirected, and put into question by the needs, gifts activities, and functions of multiple creaturely others situated with the human in a complex network of relationships.

⁸ Keller (*Face of the Deep*) provides a strong and compelling critique of Barth's phallogocentric God. She problematizes projects like my own that appreciate Barth's de-centering of the self-sufficient modern subject, arguing that he only succeeds in doing so by projecting attributes of self-sufficiency and mastery onto God, who in the incarnation becomes the unpenetrated penetrator. Thus conceived, God's dominion over creation and humankind serves as Barth's support for the dominion of men over women (85, 89, 95-6). While I agree that much of Barth's humbling of the human subject follows from its dependence on divine activity, Keller's account does not recognize the ways in which Barth incorporates vulnerability into the divine life through the incarnation (although she would likely not find this sufficient to address the aseity of Barth's God). For instance, she does not address Gen. 2 where Barth finds Christ's death prefigured in Adam who must suffer a life-threatening wound in order for God to extract the rib that will be Eve from his side. Barth's phallic God is a complex picture because of the intimate connection and incorporation of the (vulnerable) human Jesus into the divine life through the Son; and this makes the incarnation a useful figure for subversive and queer readings. My reading of Barth shares Keller's concern with the patriarchal and phallic dimensions of his reading of Gen. 1-2, especially in its effacement of maternal imagery. However my critique of Barth's account makes recourse to the epistemic and revelatory centrality of Christ, who serves for Barth as the mirror to the human-subject and the only recourse s/he has to self-knowledge and to knowledge of God. The unstable site that Christ occupies in Barth's thought (dying/resurrected, wounded/reigning, human/divine, obedient/commanding) enables interventions into Barth's efforts to fix sexual difference. These dialectical attributes structure both the human subject *and* the human other (as they do most clearly in §18, and also with Adam, but not at all clearly with Eve), and so Barth's model of intersubjective engagement can function as a subversive tool that undermines hierarchical arrangements. When it comes to sexual difference however, the dialectic is fixed (when the female is associated with the humbler side of the dialectic and the male with its exalted side, as we will see in III/2). At times Barth is reticent on the dialectical structure of the female other, as is the case with Eve who is not depicted as reflecting to Adam both his humility and his hope; she remains dialectically underdeveloped when compared to the Good Samaritan of §18. As problematic as Barth's phallic-creator God depicted in Gen. 1 is for feminists like myself, the central figure, sign, and story of Christ, and Barth's use and depiction of it, opens his project up to subversions of the sort I will soon perform.

will suggest an interpretive path in better keeping with Barth's long term efforts to rob the human subject of its godlike aspirations.

In the first section of this chapter I briefly situate Barth's argument in relation to trends in his immediate intellectual context in order to expose the ways in which his reading of Genesis 2 resists some conventional ways of assessing Genesis 1-3 and configuring sexual difference (specifically in terms masculine virility and maternity). This will provide a helpful backdrop for understanding Barth's efforts to humble the male subject with a picture of creaturely dependency and constrained freedom. It will also enable me to show the ways in which Barth re-inscribes some widely held assumptions about male activity and female passivity while refusing others. In the remaining sections of the chapter, I turn to Barth's reading of the Genesis 2 narrative to show how Adam serves as a model human agent, one in whom Barth wants his readers to see a prefiguration of Christ's humanity and a reflection of what their own free activity ought to be. I will foreground subtle but significant ways in which Barth's reading of Genesis 2 humbles the human subject, decentering it in a network of creaturely relations, while at the same time exalting it as a sign of Christ's benevolence. Finally I will expose some slippery moves Barth makes when he turns Eve into the silent and inanimate buttress to male initiative. I will use Barth's reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan to imagine an alternative reading of Eve. I will also draw on Barth's earlier reading of the encounter of Mary the mother of Christ and Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist (Lk. 1) to further support my claim that Adam exemplifies a pattern of agency that all might appropriate, regardless of sex.

Barth's reading of this creation narrative will be an important resources in my final two chapters, where I turn to Barth's most problematic descriptions of sexual difference, found in §45.3 and §54.1. There he gives us little in the way of exposition of biblical narratives, certainly

nothing of the sort of rich exposition we have in §41. Instead, in both paragraphs, he refers his readers back to the work done here, briefly summarizes it, and adds some additional supporting biblical texts.

RECONFIGURING FREEDOM, MASCULINITY, AND MATERNITY

In his re-description of the Genesis 2 account of the creation and naming of Eve, Barth presents a normative scene that illustrates the boundaries within which human freedom and decision are to operate. His interpretation both resonates with and departs in telling ways from a German Romantic and Idealistic trajectory of interpreting the Eden story of Genesis 2-3, a trajectory dating back to Kant. In this trajectory, as M. H. Abrams has shown, the Genesis creation narratives are viewed as mythical or figurative representations of philosophically valid insights into human nature and the developmental history of humanity. The biblical Eden narratives are presented as childlike-stories representing an historical reality of human development from a childlike innocence to the maturity of reason with its freedom of choice. Thus the biblical fall of Genesis 3 (the eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil) is frequently viewed as an ambivalent yet overall gain for humankind. They read the eating of the fruit as an exercise in moral freedom and deliberative thinking. It represents a fall from instinct into freedom and rational thinking, but a fall that of necessity entails a loss of primordial unity and happiness. A descent into the division and strife must necessarily accompany an ascent to a state of freedom, morality and rationality.⁹ Barth was very familiar with key figures in this

⁹ See M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1973), esp. 200-5. Abrams writes: "After Kant and Schiller it became a standard procedure for the major German philosophers to show that the secular history and destiny of mankind is congruent with the Biblical story of the loss and future recovery of paradise; to interpret that story as a mythical representation of man's departure from the happiness of ignorance and self-unity into the multiple self-divisions and conflicts attendant on the emergence of

trajectory of interpretation (although he makes no explicit reference to it), and at the time of the production of this section of *Church Dogmatics*, he was also preparing his lectures on eighteenth and nineteenth century philosophers and theologians for publication.¹⁰ Against such a backdrop, Barth's focus on Genesis 2, his reading of the naming of Eve as a normative model of responsible human freedom, and his silence regarding Genesis 3 is especially striking.¹¹ Barth locates the paradigmatic moment of human deliberation and free decision not in the eating of the tree, but instead in Adam's recognition and acceptance of Eve as the companion that God has selected and gifted to him. Thus Adam in his freedom and deliberation remains subjected to divine initiative and decision, which he is free to accept gratefully. By ignoring Genesis 3, Barth excludes any discussion of Eve's initiative, speech, and act, a blind spot he shares with a romantic and idealistic trajectory that also overlooks Eve's leading-role in this particular scene from Eden.¹² Barth's reading thus continues his project of resisting influential models of

self-consciousness, free decision, and the analytic intellect; to equate the fall, so interpreted, with the beginning of speculative philosophy itself; and to evaluate the fall as a fortunate self-division, because it was the necessary first step on the educational journey by which thinking and striving man wins his way back towards his lost integrity, along a road which looks like a reversion but is in fact a progression" (217).

¹⁰ Barth's construal of human subjectivity and agency in III/1 reflects the critique of romantic and idealistic views on the nature of subjectivity and agency expressed throughout his lectures on Protestant theology. We can therefore safely assume this material was on his horizon, and he engages it in some detail in the final paragraph of *CD* III/1, §42.

¹¹ Notable also within this tradition is the emphasis on a fall from unity into division and conflict (Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 232). Barth will echo this tradition when he thinks himself to have found in the relationships between men and women of the Old Testament a consistent picture of conflict, strife, and misery—a picture that perhaps resembles his own home life where he had to negotiate the family tensions of cohabiting with both his wife (Nelly) and with Charlotte (see Selinger, *Charlotte von Kirschbaum and Karl Barth*, 11-12, for an account of the tensions resulting from his decision to incorporate Charlotte into his household; see 4-20 for her biographical account of Barth's personal relationship with Charlotte).

¹² Patricia E. Guenther-Gleason (*On Schleiermacher and Gender Politics* [Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1997]) examines the disappearance of Eve from this retellings of Gen. 2-3, especially in Kant and Schiller (159-193). When Kant and Schiller present the fall as a gain for humankind, a movement from instinct to freedom, they do not mention Eve's complicity in it or her initiating role (169). In this interpretation, only men benefit from the escape from dogmatism into the free use of reason, for they alone are depicted as employing reason against their instincts, while women come to serve as a metaphor for the instinctual (161). Guenther-Gleason notes that this effacement was not entirely unnoticed when this interpretive trajectory first began. In a 1792 treatise, one of the first German advocates for women's civil rights (Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel) observes that within this retelling Eve deserves

subjectivity, restraining notions of freedom, and retraining the reader in the unlearning of self-affirming and self-referential habits. This formative exercise will meet its limits, however, when it encounters the female other.

Barth's model of Adam, as a distinctively male figure of agency, can also be read as resisting the wartime elevation of "manly" (*männlich*, *mannhaft*) virtues, especially dominant in the Nazi ideology of the early 1930s and in the rhetoric, liturgical events, and meetings of a German Christian movement eager to raise its profile before the Nazi party. Here Barth's efforts to both humble and exalt the paradigmatically male agent of Genesis 2 can be viewed as both embedded in and a critical corrective to an overtly-virile and militaristic mode of masculinity, widely expressed in German Christian rhetoric. Doris Bergen documents the many ways in which the German Christian movement sought to promote masculine qualities in response to Nazi and neopagan critics who accused Christianity of preaching weakness, humility, and defeatism—a set of feminine traits that were thought to be antithetical to National Socialist values

the higher honor as the one who uses reason to break the bonds of instinct. In *Christmas Eve* Schleiermacher also indicates an awareness of the contradictions between the modern accounts of the harmonious nature of women and scriptural accounts that depict women as the first cause of all cleavages and the need for redemption, while in *Speeches* he protests the general tenor of the new interpretations of the fall with his own retelling (162-3, 315-7).

Barth makes no mention of Eve's initiating activity in the scene with the serpent in Gen. 3, and he is eager instead to focus on Eve's inactivity and dependence on Adam's initiating activity in the previous chapter, and so he shares the assumptions about female dependency on free male initiative that underlie this interpretive tradition's effacement of Eve in Gen. 3, while departing from this tradition in making Adam's relationship to Eve central to his human existence.

The positive role he gives to Eve has a precedent in Schleiermacher's retelling of Gen. 2, where Adam's knowledge of himself, creation, and the deity is not possible until the arrival of Eve. Guenther-Gleason gives an appreciative feminist analysis of Schleiermacher's retelling of Gen. 2 in *Speeches*. She argues that while feminists are correct to note that in his retelling the subject is male and the female acts as mediator between Adam and the deity, enabling his religious consciousness without expressing any life or language of her own, his reading nevertheless undermines two avenues of interpretation that are detrimental to women: those that see in the fall a loss for which women are to blame and those that see it as gain to which women have no access. Schleiermacher appeals to the Gen. 2 narrative when discussing a nature religion in which one does not impose one's own mental categories on nature, but instead understands the world through openness to other self-communicating minds within the world. Eve provides such an "other" to Adam. Prior to her arrival, Adam was unable to know himself, creation, or the deity, but through the love he experiences as a result of Eve's presence, he becomes capable of intuiting the world, becomes conscious of himself and what he lacks, and becomes the subject of religious consciousness (315-7). We will see that Barth shares with Schleiermacher an interest in the subject's receptivity to the mind of the other and an aversion to the imposition of the self's mind on the other, and this plays out in both of their interpretations of Gen. 2, for both make receptivity and openness to the female other central to human existence, yet Barth goes a step further by emphasizing Eve's silence and inactivity in order to subordinate her free decision to that of Adam's.

and implicated in Germany's defeat in the Great War.¹³ Many believed the fighting front of the Great War had been compromised by the weak-willed at home, which included a church evacuated of soldiers and populated with women and men not fit for the front and thus emasculated. The home front was faulted for undermining the resolve of the men on the war front.¹⁴

In keeping with this perception, in the early 1930s the German Christian movement sought to portray itself as the “manly” church, populated and run by men exhibiting the soldierly qualities of ruthlessness, aggression, hardness, heroism, and the disciplined and enthusiastic following of orders.¹⁵ They drew heavily on military and wartime associations in their use of flags, boots, marching formations, physical violence, songs and slogans, and they aimed to give music and new hymns a manly style.¹⁶ In their promotion of masculine role models they found

¹³ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 61.

¹⁴ Ibid., 66-8. See Stibbe, “Anti-Feminism, Nationalism and the German Right, 1914–1920,” 185-210, for an origin of this perception in the First World War. The outbreak of nationalism in the First World War reinforced and recast traditional gender inequalities. The war front was the male sphere of the soldier and hero, and women were reduced to supportive, largely passive roles in care of children and home. But as women were recruited into male occupations in order to fill gaps opening as more men were drafted, this barrier between private female and public male sphere was undermined, with new types of female identities emerging in the public domain. At the same time opposition to subordinate traditional gender roles and their implied passivity came from several sources during the war years: 1) a radical feminist minority that opposed war efforts; 2) socialist and bourgeois feminist activists who did not consider patriotic loyalty to exclude the push for reform of women's place in society (in the form of better working conditions, lower food prices, increased maternity allowances); these activists pushed for changes while expressing the unique role women served in the national community as mothers and in raising children; 3) upper-middle class women who carved out a distinct political identity for themselves within the conservative and national camp by emphasizing their special mission as moral guardians of the nation and its traditional Germanic values against social degeneration. Radical right-wing groups conflated all such female activist efforts with the pacifist and “defeatist” elements that they feared were weakening Germany from within, but even these conservative forces, opposed to feminism as they were, gradually came to admit the inevitability of women's political activity in public contexts and to make efforts to mobilize women's organizations towards their own ends.

¹⁵ Bergen, *Twisted Cross*, 63. Bergen notes that in much German Christian rhetoric and publications *männlich* and *mannhaft* were the adjectives used frequently to modify the nouns for church, Christianity and faith: both can be translated manly or masculine and connote virility, bravery, and resoluteness. *Männlich* was often contrasted with *schwach* (weak), and *weichlich* (effeminate, soft, or weak) (62). For Bergen's full discussion of the gender dynamics of the German Christian Movement see 61-81, 119-141, 192-205. Barth will avoid such contrasting language in his depiction of both Adam and Eve.

¹⁶ Ibid., 65, 79.

the Old Testament to be too tainted as a Jewish text to offer useful heroes, in spite of its many warrior figures, and the New Testament was problematic for its lack of warriors. Much effort was put into revising the image of Jesus to portray him with heroic soldierly qualities, and Bergen notes the widespread revulsion at the title “Lamb of God.”¹⁷ German Christians conceptualized the German Church struggle as a recreation of the war experience that inspired true manliness expressed in courage and single mindedness.¹⁸ Bergen notes that the Confessing Church was also concerned to demonstrate its manly image, and it directed little criticism at this aspect of its opponent’s rhetoric.¹⁹

At the same time, as I noted in my previous chapter, women found a place in Nazi ideology and in German Christian rhetoric, primarily in their role as mother-figures (physically and spiritually). In the militaristic and antisemitic rhetoric of the German Christian movement this role came primarily in the form of a loving, self-sacrificing eagerness to preserve racial purity, both biologically and spiritually. Liturgical revisions, in the form of new hymns and poems, celebrated this maternal role, and German Christian hymnbooks devoted an entire section to motherhood. The mother-figure served as a complementary foil for the combative ideal man.

¹⁷ They had greater success finding heroes in Germany’s past and present than in biblical figures. Martin Luther especially exemplified the fusion of manliness, Christianity, and Germanness, and his rejection of monasticism and celibacy were valued. The nationalist poet, Ernst Moritz Arndt, served as a hero, as did the movement’s own leaders, especially Reich Bishop Müller, who in German Christian propaganda exhibited a manly Christianity in his military uniform, coarse speech, and his references to war time experience (see *ibid.*, 74-81 on heroes of the German Christian movement).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 81. Bergen documents the anxiety among German Christians about the lack of male presence in their gatherings. While very much dependent on the faithful participation of women (who usually outnumbered men at meetings) and on the involvement of women’s organizations (130), they sought to attract men by enhancing the impression of manliness and mocking feminine traits. They incorporated military imagery and the presence of soldiers in their events, and they gathered in veteran halls and pubs decorated with national flags. Success of the events was measured by percentage of men in attendance, and greater value was given to younger men, especially those in uniform. But beginning in 1933 the Nazi party started to disassociate the military from church matters through a series of directives that included the prohibiting of party uniforms at church services (71-3). Bergen documents a shift in rhetoric after 1933, when manly slogans declined in usage as the movement’s leaders realized that by overstating these virtues they were alienating the much-needed female members of the movement (201).

Women were viewed as the guardians of virtue. They were stereotyped as more emotional, less rational, and more spiritual than men, and they were perceived to possess traits that allowed them to function as the religious conscience of the Volk.²⁰

I will keep this backdrop in mind as I turn a critical eye on Barth's account of sexual difference. As a model of male subjectivity, Barth's depiction of Adam can be appreciated for its resistance to such models of masculinity. He does not employ such manly or maternal rhetoric. He departs from these trends in his efforts to humble Adam in his dependence on various divine and creaturely entities. Next to the readings of Bonhoeffer and Vischer, on whom Barth depends favorably, Barth's Adam occupies a humbled position in relation to other creaturely entities, although he will regain some losses in his precedence over Eve.²¹ The warrior male and maternal female are not discernible in Barth's Adam and Eve, but instead he presents his reader with the farmer and his partner, bound to each other in their service to the earth. In my previous chapter I noted the ways in which Barth reproduces a masculinist logic in the creative and vocal activity of a powerful God set in overpowering contrast to an impotent-because-maternal brooding contemplative spirit. In his reading of Genesis 2, however, we see a model of male agency that is wounded and exalted, dependent and lordly, and one that constrains the virile masculinity proliferating in the wartime time imaginations. Yet at the same time his privileging of male agency participates in that rhetoric's androcentrism and hierarchy.

²⁰ Ibid., 120-6, 195. This was a role that many women enacted through letter writing campaigns in which they voiced criticism of male leaders. Women were necessary to the movement, formed its greatest numbers at all events, but had a marginal presence in offices and leadership positions and were for the most part to keep a low profile so as not to compromise the manly image that the movement sought to project (ibid., 120, 132-5).

²¹ For comparisons of Barth's account with that of Vischer and Bonhoeffer, see fn. 2, 24, 27, 36, and Ch. 2, fn. 53, and 55.

ORIGINATING ADAM: THE HUMBLER AND EXALTED SIGN OF CHRIST

God is Barth's protagonist in the second creation saga and not the human Adam. As Barth reads it, Genesis 2 is "recounting history in the temporal sequence of events" (III/1, 240), and these events are a series of divine activities, in which each act works toward the completion or fulfillment of the preceding. Barth divides Genesis 2 into three scenes encompassing the three sequences of divine activity that make up the overarching plot (vv. 4b-7; 8-17; 18-25). The first scene (Gen. 2.4b-7) opens with the earth already created and in need of completion through further creative activity. Adam is this completion of the earth. Taken from the earth and gifted to it as its servant-tiller, Adam is given to aid the earth's production of plant life. In this very capacity as servant, Adam functions as the sign of God's goodwill for the earth (a sign of God's will to sustain life, and ultimately a sign of the resurrection promised in Christ). In the second scene (Gen. 2.8-17), Adam is himself in need of completion through two further acts of God. God plants for Adam a garden-home and places him in it as the sanctuary and temple in which he benefits from the earth's service of shelter and nourishment, and in turn he serves it by fulfilling his obligation as cultivator. Various features of this sanctuary will provide signs of God's goodwill and intent for Adam, and as such they will simultaneously bestow a prohibition on him appropriate to his unique creaturely freedom. In the third scene (Gen. 2:18-25), God completes Adam's creation (and with him the creation of the cosmos), first by leading a lonely Adam on an unsatisfactory quest for a companion among the animals, and next by constructing Eve out of Adam's own body and presenting her to Adam as a sign of God's goodwill. The gifting of Eve imposes on Adam the obligation of the appropriate creaturely response to God's decision. Barth depicts Adam's recognition and naming of Eve (and notably *not* the eating of the prohibited tree) as the first free human act, and Adam's response will have all those features of the seeking,

hearing, acknowledging human subject that I described in my previous chapters. Adam seeks the divine gift to no avail, only then to have it presented to him through no effort on his part. His part will be only to recognize the divine gift and name it as such. In this activity, Adam plays a part in creation history itself, participating in his own completion. By contrast, Eve says and does nothing, and this inactivity will illustrate for Barth the key features of female alterity and its subordination to male agency.

In his discussion of each scene Barth first describes the grammatical sense of the text, employing a variety of exegetical tools in order to occupy the narrational perspective that he imagines the author to occupy. He then shifts to an explicit discussion of the figurative sense of the scene as it anticipates covenant history. He delineates first the ways in which he imagines the author to be using the narrative to prefiguring the covenant history of God with Israel, and then he finds that history's culmination and completion in Christ's life-story. However, Barth's plain-sense discussion of each scene in the narrative is already geared and oriented to support his two-staged figural reading. His figurative readings imitate the movement toward completion and fulfillment that drives his readings of the narrative plot. In this way Barth's grammatical and exegetical analysis of the narrative's "plain-sense" embeds his figurative logic of completion within the story-line itself, as a biblical support for his resuscitation of an abandoned interpretive practice.²² This enables Barth to present his more explicit figural readings as if they flow

²² We see this made explicit in his figural discussion of scene two. Looking back over his exposition of this scene, Barth turns to discuss its prefigurative sense, starting first with the perspective he imagines his narrator takes in looking forward to Israel's history with Yahweh. Barth states: "what is here recorded as creation history is in the last resort incomprehensible if we do not see that the form of this covenant is already prepared and outlined here, characterising both the totality and the individual constituents of the "pre-historical" origination described" (267). In order to support the claim that the narrator is not primarily concerned here with a general anthropology (detached from covenant history as the timeless truth of myth) Barth insists that the narrator's gaze is always looking beyond the narrative of creation to the history of the covenant: "Of course the writer fabulises, yet not accidentally, arbitrarily or at random. He does so with a definite intention and according to the definite law of a divination and imagination stimulated but also regulated by the revelation given to Israel. Hence he has neither the time nor the desire to be occupied with the origination of the world and man in general, but with that of the world and the man

obviously from the plain sense and perspective of the text itself. In this way he performs the role of the dogmatician who obediently re-describes what the narrative witness compels him to recognize: that creation is always already revelatory of the covenant history toward which it moves.

In this chapter I follow Barth's performance as he inhabits and re-enacts the gaze and praise of the narrator. I will foreground a number of themes within the narrative as a whole that are pertinent specifically to the agential and figural status of the relationship between the sexes: 1) the humbled and exalted position of Adam (and of the reader who is permitted to recognize himself in Adam); 2) the freedom and activity modeled by Adam and lacking in Eve (and in those who are to recognize themselves in her); 3) the ordering and reversals at play in Adam's relation to non-human creaturely others. I will describe Barth's various strategies for humbling and exalting the figure of Adam in whom the reader is to recognize a figure of Christ and a mirror to (him)self. Barth will thereby delimit the sphere in which the male subject will enact his free service to God. Eve too will occupy a humble and exalted status, but far more ambiguously so, as she provides the object and occasion for a continuously seeking but always dependent, now paradigmatically male, mode of agency. Assumptions about female passivity will emerge in subtle but noteworthy ways. We will continue to see Barth's refusal to recognize maternal imagery. Barth's inability to give a coherent account of a distinctively female mode of activity will mirror this refusal.

whose existence will receive its meaning in the execution of God's covenant. Already, then, in this origination as God's creation he can seek and find not merely the intention of a future covenant but its foundation and lineaments" (267-8). In regard to Barth's revival of a figural interpretive practice that finds the narrative arc of Christ's life, death, and glorification prefigured in the Old Testament, see Hans Frei *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, David Ford, *Barth and God's Story*, K.E. Greene-McCreight, *Ad Litteram*, and my discussion in Ch. 2, fn. 5, 6, and 42.

Scene One (Gen. 2:4-7): Adam Taken from the earth

Throughout his retelling, Barth de-centers Adam's place within the Genesis narrative by emphasizing and foregrounding the activity and identity of the Creator. The Creator's identity and character is continually disclosed to Barth through the details of the narrative arc. The narrative places the reader before Yahweh the Lord revealed in the history of Israel, whose identity is inseparable from the history of the covenant:

The Israelite who hears or reads about the Creator is to think at once of the One to whom he and his nation owe everything, against whom he and his people have sinned a thousand times, but who incomprehensibly has never failed to be faithful to him and his people. This God is the God of creation. (234)

In relation to the story's proper protagonists, Adam can play only a secondary and dependent role. He is from the beginning simultaneously humbled and exalted by his relation to divine activity, but also by his relation to and place within the rest of creation, a status that prefigures for the Israelite audience their role as the community of Israel in relation to the nations:

The man who here comes into existence-earthly but breathed upon by God, breathed upon by God and yet earthy-is the man of Israel: most deeply humiliated but highly exalted, highly exalted and yet humiliated; the object of judgment and mercy, and of mercy and judgment (for we must always include them both)-as he stands and walks before his God, not as an individual but as a responsible member of his people, the people of Israel of every age and in all its members. (243)

In the opening scene of the saga, Barth first exposes the humbled status of Adam, before turning to his exalted status.

Adam arrives on the scene as the servant provided by God to complete God's intent for the barren earth, but he is not uniquely assigned to this lowly role. Unlike the first creation saga in which vegetation seems ordained and created to be food for humans and animals, Barth observes that in this less anthropocentric saga, vegetation is an end in itself. Vegetation is that without which an earth (barren and lifeless in itself) cannot be completed and perfected. The first

act of God in this story is therefore to complete and perfect the barren earth by planting vegetation and providing *two* helper-servants to facilitate its growth (and thus its completion and fulfillment). Adam the gardener arrives as but one of these helpers (and here only the second to be named). He must perform “the concrete duty to cultivate and tend the things which God has planted” (235) in the company of a mist that God will cause to arise from earth (like Adam) to water the whole ground. In this way Barth construes Adam as twice humbled, first by his status as servant to a barren earth and second by his dependence on a co-worker who shares this task with him. A parallel claim is made later of Eve’s servant-status in relation to Adam, only she will be unique in her role as servant, helper and facilitator of Adam’s completion. Thus, from the beginning Barth robs the first human of any recourse to an “independent position in the totality of creation” and any corresponding claim to a special dignity therein (235).²³

The humbled status of Adam is further evident to Barth in the source from which he originates: “He is not a new element planted by God like shrubs and vegetation” (235), but rather “he owes his existence wholly and utterly to the fact that from a particular handful of the dust of the earth God willed to make him” (237). Barth will repeat this talk of utter dependency later on when he discusses Eve’s origination from Adam’s side. Furthermore, Adam is not unique in this capacity, for he shares this humble source with animals, and he also shares with them his animation by the divine breath. His animation has its limits as a transitory and temporary state, for Adam does not possess that gift of breath and animation, for he has it only as long as Yahweh continues to give it. Together with the animals Adam has the tendency to return to the earth (35-9).

²³ With the opening scene’s narration of “the process of the special creation of man” (235), Barth declares that “from the beginning he stands under the law of humility and the fear of God” (236).

These various features of Adam's humility (his dependency and relativity) are also the very features by which Adam is exalted, through a divine act that lends symbolic status to otherwise mundane features. God selects a clump of dust from the earth, constructs Adam out of it, and breathes life into him, thereby turning him into a sign of God's goodwill to sustain life against the threat of death and dissolution. As such Adam is a sign and prefiguration of Christ. Key to the prefigurative significance of Adam is both the divine selection and the barren and lifeless character of the earth—a threat to the farmer-reader. The earth has no capacity for the plant-life, mist, or the human being God causes to arise from it. It is barren and lifeless.

In emphasizing this characteristic of the earth, Barth rejects any association of earth with maternal generation and fecundity. In view of divine creative activity Barth wants to emphasize creaturely incapacity, and the imagery of maternal fecundity compromises that emphasis. Here Barth signals his departure from both Gunkel and Bonhoeffer with respect to such imagery:

There is no place here, of course, for the idea of "mother earth" ["Mutter Erde"]. Gunkel's suggestion that it is given a "monotheistic turn" is quite inadmissible. It is quite impossible both in the sense and course of the saga and in the rest of the Old Testament. It is not the earth but God who produces man, and He does so according to His plan and decree, in the free choice of a lump of earth and in the sovereign formation of this lump. The Pauline association of creation with the resurrection of the dead (Rom. 4¹⁷) is very much to the point in relation to Gen. 2⁷.... For the sake of clarity it is best not to speak of a "deep sleep of creation" which man originally slept, "resting on virgin soil [*am jungen Erdboden ruhend*] ... in full surrender to the blessed earth," as D. Bonhoeffer wrote in commenting on the famous painting of Michelangelo. What existed prior to the event described here was not man, either in the womb of mother earth [*ein Mensch im Mutterleib der Erde*] or sleeping on the earth. It was merely a lump of earth like others, but one out of which man was creatively fashioned by God. (244-5/277)

In his commentary on Genesis 1-2, Bonhoeffer draws connections between earth, maternity, and death in describing the creation of Adam.²⁴ Barth's departure from Bonhoeffer is especially

²⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer's reading of Adam, which Barth refers to on several occasions, differs from Barth here (*Creation and Fall*). Bonhoeffer genders the dead earth linking it to the womb (46, 54), a troubling alignment that Barth avoids in his aversion to maternal imagery. Bonhoeffer writes: "The 'earth is his mother'; he comes out of her womb....From it he has his *body*....the essential point of human existence is its bond with mother earth, its being as

telling. Barth emphasizes the barren arid lifelessness of the earth from which Adam is constructed, in order first to emphasize Adam's complete dependence on divine creative activity for his emergence, and second to emphasize Adam's function as a sign of the goodwill of the creator to sustain life over against the continual threat of death and dissolution. Barth's association of Adam's emergence with resurrection is especially noteworthy, given the prefigurative role that Adam's emergence from the earth has for Barth. The aridity of the earth represents the lifelessness and death that threaten human existence and Adam's emergence from it is a hope-evoking sign of the divine goodwill to sustain life (see esp. 245). The language he uses and his theological concerns (to emphasize the primacy of divine activity) echo his maneuvers in his earlier reading of Genesis 1:2 where the chaotic and boundless waters (over which hovered a Spirit that is not the Creator God) were likewise said to be barren, sterile, unproductive [*unfruchtbaren*] (*KD*, 118-9). Barth's concern there as here is to emphasize its inherent inability or incapacity to participate in the divine activity of creation.

Adam is not the only sign of hope, for Barth finds another sign in the mist, which is "the companion and therefore the friend of man; the longed-for sign of the goodness of God and the

body." Bonhoeffer goes on to associate this womb-like earth with death: "He comes out of the earth in which he slept and was dead; he is called out by the Word of God the Almighty, in himself a piece of earth, but earth called into human being by God. 'Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine upon thee'" (46-7). Barth does not align the dead earth with maternal womb, yet at the same time he does not always insist on the earth's inactivity (as the passage here might suggest). In III/1, 153 he speaks of the earth's activity in generating plants, and finds it to be analogous to human obedience. The earth becomes an active subject bringing forth plants and trees from its seed as commanded, but not of its own creative power, nor as a co-worker side by side with the Word, but because it is enabled by the Word to do what it cannot do of itself. The earth remains (in Barth's reading) utterly incapable of resources for this life-generating activity, and completely dependent on divine activity for its ability to respond. Here then, we can detect, in the earth's incapacity and subsequent divinely-enabled generative activity, Barth's analogy of faith and an archetype of human obedience (III/1, 153). As I suggested earlier, maternal imagery in this context appears problematic to Barth precisely because of its generative capacities. Barth's construction of the virgin conception in *CD* I/2, §15 would be a more fitting analogy for God's creative work, but he does not mention it. (I discuss the virgin conception later on in this chapter)

Bonhoeffer also explicitly compares Adam's receipt of the breath of life to the sacrament of Christ's body and blood, noting that this breathing of the Spirit into the human distinguishes the human body from all non-human bodies. Adam is created as a body, and therefore also redeemed as a body, in Christ and in the sacrament (*Creation and Fall*, 47-8). While Bonhoeffer does not explicitly subordinate Eve to Adam, Barth does more to humble the exalted Adam than does Bonhoeffer, a point I note again below.

coming perfection of the earth” (241): “that the earth given to him should not remain arid; that it should constantly be a green earth and therefore first become moist, is the concern of man and the gift of God in this saga” (243).²⁵

As the beneficiary of such a gifted co-worker, Adam is also himself such a sign, gifted to the earth and all creation, but one with a far more explicit christocentric value. In constructing Adam as this sign of Christ, God selects mundane features of Adam’s existence that he shares with animals (his origin from dust, his animation by divine breath), to signify God’s good will that will culminate in Christ. While Adam, like the animals, must be animated by God’s breath, the direct and personal way in which God communicates his breath (by breathing directly into Adam’s nostrils), signals Adam’s exaltation as a sign of hope. Adam is in need of this sign, as one whose nature is transitory, always threatened by the inevitable return and dissolution again into dust (238). It is precisely as such a sign that he is to serve the earth as its gardener. In facilitating the growth of plant life from the dust, his labor is patterned after the activity of God, who animated him from the dust. In this respect, he is a sign to the very earth from which he is taken, and he is gifted to it as its tiller.²⁶

It is just because man, with God as his refuge and hope, can triumph over the earthiness of earth from which he comes and to which he must return, that he is destined, within the totality of the creaturely world, to serve the earth as a husbandman and a gardener. The hope of the arid, barren and dead earth [*die trockene, unfruchtbare, tote Erde*] is that it will bear the vegetation planted by God. According to the second account of creation, we must add that this is the hope of the whole creaturely world. It proceeds from death to life. But the realisation of this hope waits for man as the being which, earthy by nature, will triumph over the aridity, barrenness and deadness of the earth because God is his refuge and hope, because God has constituted Himself as such. His existence will be the sign which will contradict the whole earthiness of earth. His act will be an act of release

²⁵ Barth suggests this in a section of fine print where he compares water and earth in this narrative (J) to the threatening association of water and earth in the first saga (P). The source of threat in the first saga is, in the second saga, a divinely gifted comforting companion and friend and as such a sign and promise of divine goodwill (242).

²⁶ “The ground also has a hope for the fulfilment of which man must be prepared with his existence and ability to work” (238).

for the earth too, and for the whole creaturely world. And what he will take with him when he returns to earth will be the promise of life for everything terrestrial. Thus the existence of man within the whole is indeed the existence of one who is commissioned to serve [*Dienst*] and work [*Arbeit*]. He must give himself to till and keep the earth in order that it may have meaning when God will bring it to perfection. In this function man is responsible to both God and the creature. And in this function he fulfils the meaning of his own existence. (237/268-9)

Yet even in this function Adam must not forget that it is God who plants the earth, brings about its perfection and fulfills its hope, nor must he forget that “it is not he but God who will create the other condition for the fulfilment of this hope, who will provide a mist for the earth and therefore rain and the humidity without which the service and work of man would be in vain” (237). It is therefore God who secures creation’s hope, and Adam is but a sign of this hope, both in his very existence and his work [*Arbeit*] and service [*Dienst*] (237-8/268-9). Benefitting from the service of the mist he is also to serve.

With these strategies of humiliation, Barth decenters the human who will recognize himself in Adam, as one who is first gifted as servant to the earth, and as one whose labor on the earth’s behalf represents a promise of God’s goodwill to sustain life in the face of a threatening dissolution. Adam is presented alongside mist, itself an actor, as the gift and sign to the earth. The creation of earth prefigures and promises the covenant in this very logic of completion. The earth is first created in its bare-bones existence, but its completion requires a further act of creation: the production of mist and Adam, who together are signs that point to the covenant history that will complete, and fulfill creation history. Barth thus inscribes within the narrative arc itself the relationship his doctrine of creation has to his doctrine of reconciliation.²⁷

²⁷ Barth’s reading of Gen. 1-2 has many points and details in common with Bonhoeffer’s and Vischer’s, so it allows for an interesting comparison, which I have already begun in this and the previous chapter. While neither Bonhoeffer or Vischer (explicitly) attempt to subordinate female to male in their readings of Gen. 1-2 (for both, the relation appears egalitarian and mutual), and while all three draw special attention to the lofty status of the human being, neither Bonhoeffer nor Vischer restrict that anthropological status with an emphasize on the humility of Adam in his relation to other creaturely entities. Barth shows an interest in the details of the other creatures in a way they do not, finding signs of grace in them. For example, whereas Bonhoeffer is embarrassed by the magical

Before turning to the second scene of the narrative, Barth pauses to make explicit the figural relation of creation history to covenant history, already implicit in his reading of the first scene. Barth's narrator has Israel's covenant history always in view. He shares Barth's disinterest in constructing an anthropology for its own sake, and so he cannot imagine the human being as anything other than the elect covenant partner of the Yahweh made known in Israel's history. Thus the narrator construes Adam's relation to the earth as a type of Israel's relation to the nations. Adam prefigures Israel's election and calling from among all the nations as mediator on their behalf, thereby signaling "the exaltation and humility of its status as God's servant to them, and the insoluble connexion of its hope with the hope of the whole cosmos" (239, 238-9, 247-8).

Casting his gaze beyond the history of Yahweh with Israel, Barth declares that if we see in Adam a prefiguration of Israel's divinely appointed relation as a sign to the nations, then we have to take the next step and see Christ's life, death, and resurrection arc in Adam and Israel together:

If we do not deny but believe this, we shall have to press forward to a final and deepest meaning of the content of the passage. He, Jesus Christ, is the man whose existence was necessary for the perfecting of the earth; for the redemption of its aridity, barrenness and death; for the meaningful fulfilment of its God-given hope; and especially for the realisation of the hope of Israel. He is the man who, taken from all creation, all humanity and all Israel, and yet belonging to them and a victim of their curse, was in that direct, personal and special immediacy of God to Him a creature, man, the seed of Abraham and the Son of David. He is the man whose confidence and hope was God alone but really God; who is what He is for all, for all Israel, all humanity, and even the whole world; who in the deepest humility and the fear of God gave up Himself wholly to the fate of the creature, man and Israel, and in this way was decisively exalted and reigns over all creatures, the King of Israel and Saviour of the world, triumphing over all their weakness. He is the man who did not return empty handed, but with the spoils of hope, to the earth from which He was taken but for which He was also given. The man of whom the saga

character of the Eden-garden, which he finds expressive of a mythical worldview, Barth explicitly names these features sacramental by depicting trees and water as signs of grace for Adam and the reader. Bonhoeffer and Barth also differ in their interpretation of Adam's relation to the earth. For Bonhoeffer the divine animating breath signifies Adam's freedom from the earth (35ff), whereas for Barth this breath makes Adam a sign to himself, the earth, and all of creation with it: a sign of God's will to sustain life against the threat of its dissolution, and so in this respect it functions, not as a sign of human freedom, but rather of divine grace and its initiative (see Wilhelm Vischer, *The Witness of the Old Testament to Christ*, 47-64; Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 35-65).

spoke, objectively if not subjectively, is-in respect of the solution of the riddle of Israel and the fulfilment of its hope-this man Jesus. So near are we in this second creation history to the threshold of the history of the covenant and salvation that, even though we continue to give due attention to the other strata of its content, we cannot interpret it finally, and therefore decisively, in any other way than this. (239)

And so the dogmatician finds in an Israel threatened by dissolution into the nations, and an Adam threatened by dissolution into dust, the foreshadowing of Christ's death and resurrection, itself the hope of Israel and of the Church. Creation history in this opening scene prefigures covenant history in its Old Testament and New Testament layers. Divine activity selects mundane features that Adam shares with other creatures and lends them a specific christological content.

The origin of Christ's body from Mary's womb is not mentioned by Barth in this figural context. Adam's origin from the earth prefigures Israel's origin from the nations and Christ's origin "from all creation, all humanity and all Israel" (239). While Barth emphasizes the divine selection of one specific clump of dust and one specific group of people, he does not at any point note an analogy in the divine selection of one female body among the many from which to take the humanity of Christ.²⁸ This is a point I will return to toward the end of this chapter when I look at Barth's discussion of Mary's conception in Luke 1, in a text written some years earlier. We will see that Barth's construction of the virgin conception actually has much in common with his reading of the origin of Adam from the earth and the origin of Eve from Adam: in these earlier writings Barth consistently configures the conception of Christ as a miraculous divine act on creaturely material that is utterly incapable of the work God does with it. Barth aligns the miracle of the virgin conception with the miracle of the resurrection of the dead, and likewise, in III/1, he aligns God's creation of Adam from the dust with the resurrection of the dead, using

²⁸ The unwatered, unplanted and uncultivated earth that Barth emphasizes here in Gen 2. parallels the deep of Gen. 1.2, which, covered by darkness, represents the state which God in creation has negated and rejected (III/1, 241); if maternal imagery is rejected in Gen. 1.2, it will also be rejected here.

Romans 4:17, as I noted above (244-5). There are enough parallels between Barth's view of the virgin conception and his view of the Creator's activity in Genesis 2 to make it an appropriate reference in this context, precisely because his earlier interest in Mary centers on the human impossibility of a virginal conception, rather than Mary's maternal role once Christ is conceived or Mary's piety. By the end of his reading of Genesis 2, however, we will see that any reference to Christ's origin from Mary would unsettle his figural connection of Adam to Christ and Eve to the Church. This may be a contributing factor to Barth's silence with regard to the virgin conception.

Scene Two (Gen. 2:8-17): Adam Gifted to the Garden

With Adam's agency (his assigned agrarian work) configured as a sign of the saving work of Christ, Barth's treatment of the next two scenes of the narrative address the completion of Adam's creation precisely as sign and servant. Scene two narrates the divine provision of a garden-home (tabernacle) in which Adam is to perform his service to the earth. Notably it is in this specific selected terrestrial sphere that Adam is confronted by the divine benefactor and law-giver. The sphere resembles a tabernacle, with revelatory signs of this confrontation. In describing the garden-temple, Barth delineates the parameters in which human freedom will operate, always as a response to encounter with the divine gift-giver. Scene three narrates the divine gift of a companion-helper (a companionship that mist, river, and animals cannot provide), and it narrates Adam's first free act: the verbalized grateful recognition of God's gift of a neighbor and helper.

In the second scene (Gen. 2:8-17), Barth speaks of the general sacramental character of the garden and Adam's role within it, and in doing so Barth delineates the arena in which human

activity finds its place as a response to the divine gift and direction. The divine protagonist plants a garden and places Adam in it, and the garden is a temple for the mutual service of Adam to earth and earth to Adam. Barth's narrator conceives of Eden as a template of the Tabernacle and he sees in Adam's cultivating role a prefiguration of the duty of priests and Levites within the Tabernacle (254).²⁹ The garden is the arena of human activity and (liturgical) service for Adam, but as such it is the place of Sabbath rest (paralleling the divine rest of the seventh day of the first saga, into which the first human pair is invited). It is a place where nourishment is abundant and the required agrarian work does not disturb the joy and rest (249-51, 254). Here the human servant in turn benefits from the garden's service, for the garden is "a place on earth where it is clear that the earth which man is ordained to serve (*dienen*) is also ordained to serve him" (250-1/284). It does so through its bountiful excess of plant life, fruit, water, and shelter. Barth here reverses the ordering of service. The earth that is to benefit from Adam's service imitates the act and serves Adam in turn. We might recall at this point the service the neighbor renders the self in §18. There the neighbor's aid is a sign of Christ's benefit, and simultaneously it imposes on the self the obligation to return the service and become a neighbor to the other. We will see shortly that as fond as Barth is of such reversals he will not find a parallel reversal in the ordering of service between Adam and his neighbor-helper Eve.

Discernible in Barth's reading is the double agency of divine determination and corresponding creaturely self-determination. Divine activity is ultimately responsible for the creaturely activity of both Adam and the earth. God plants the garden, causes a river to flow out of the earth, and sets Adam within the garden. The earth (obedient to the divine creative will) serves Adam in generating plant life, just as the river serves the garden and all the earth in

²⁹ "The duty of man in this place is to cultivate and keep it-literally, to serve and watch over it-and it is no fancy if we see here the functions of the priests and Levites in the temple united in the person of one man" (254).

watering them, just as Adam serves the earth and plant life in cultivating it. Thus a certain form of obedient activity is attributed to earth and water as well as to Adam, reminding us of the earlier reference to mist as a co-worker with Adam. In their respective activities they all function as signs of divine good will. We will see shortly that in the company of such a variety of creaturely actors and activities Barth's Eve will be remarkably inanimate.

For Barth, the tabernacle-garden is saturated with prefigurative significance of a divine goodwill that overflows in the excess of creaturely activity. This divinely selected and planted garden is particularly designed for Adam's benefit, as the tabernacle in which he will perform his liturgical and prefigurative work on the earth's behalf (251, 253). Through the eyes of Adam, Barth views the river flowing from the garden as "the promise and revelation and gift" (256) that depicts God's goodwill toward all of creation and as a sign of the function Adam's own work will serve. Adam's co-worker and co-sign, the mist, has now produced the river that waters the entire garden and overflows beyond its boundaries to the ends of the earth. God's aqueous gift exceeds the needs of its immediate beneficiaries: "Paradise itself is the place of glory. Not in the fulness and beauty of its own life, however, can it be made known as the place of glory but only in the selflessness in which it gives back what it was first given, only in the external and distant fulness and beauty of the river which flows out of it and divides, and of the blessing of this river" (255). Thus Eden, having received the benefit of the water, imitates the gift-giving and returns the service to all the earth. Adam is not the lone sign of God's life-giving care to the earth (and to the reader), although he alone is linked explicitly to Christ. Adam (and the reader by way of Adam) sees his own divinely-ordained service reflected in the river, for it is "here that man first becomes a witness of this act of blessing and therefore realises what God has in mind for himself" (255). Thus in the activity of the flowing river and the blessing it bestows on the whole

earth, the divine Benefactor provides a sign to Adam and all the earth of life-sustaining goodwill. Recognizing himself as a benefactor of God's grace, signified in the river, Adam also recognizes the duty God has set for him. Having received from God through the river, he must give in kind by becoming a sign of divine grace in his own service to the earth (254-5).

The two trees at the center of the garden are, Barth suggests, this tabernacle's Holliest of Holies (254). Having emphasized all along the divine prerogative in creation history, Barth finds that the trees delimit the space within which human freedom and activity has its place. The dialectic of gospel and law, implicit in the garden's various signs, is discernible here too. The tree of life is "a sign which speaks for itself," not mediating but representing the reality of the gift that Adam is enjoying in the garden (256-7).³⁰ The prohibition against eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (the law) is only communicated after the gift (the gospel) is reiterated. Only after God first permits Adam to eat of all of the trees does God prohibit the fruit of this one particular tree.

This second tree represents the possibility of being able to distinguish what ought and ought not to be—a strictly divine prerogative, and as such an impossible possibility. The prohibited tree confronts Adam with his limits. God alone decides between what is good and evil, discerning between them in the very activity of creating. From this knowledge and discernment, God gifts existence and its necessary sustenance to the human creature. The limited choice that this gift and prohibition open up for the first man is the question of whether, in the life ordained for him in fellowship with God, he will acknowledge God's prerogative gratefully, accepting it thankfully, or whether he will usurp the divine prerogative and insist that he himself

³⁰ When it comes to Eve we will need to recall this comment: the tree of life, as sign that speaks for itself (without doing anything), and one that is given marginal narrative attention when compared to the second tree. Parallels are found in Eve, who is also said to be a sign that speaks for herself without doing (or saying) anything. But talk of inequality, order, and submission intervene only in Barth's discussion of Eve, and not in his discussion of the two trees.

must first know evil and good in order to discern for himself whether or not God's decision and gift should be gratefully accepted (257-60):

The life of man is ordained to be lived in fellowship with God, i.e., in the acknowledgment [*Anerkennung*] of His deity and therefore of His judicial office in creation. But everything obviously hinges upon man's recognition and acceptance of the judicial office of God. And this raises the critical question whether he will do so. Will man acknowledge and praise [*erkennen und lobpreisen*] God as the One who has found concerning good and evil, salvation and perdition, life and death, so that all that he has to do is to rejoice and be thankful-consciously thankful-on the earth which has been created? Or will he hold aloof from this offer of supreme fellowship between God and himself and lay down the impossible but tempting condition that he must first know evil as well as good, that he must first know what God has not willed and rejected as well as what He has willed and created, and then when he has achieved a certain competence, a knowledge of what God knows, he will accept His judicial sentence and place himself on the basis of it? Instead of recognising and praising [*zu erkennen und zu preisen*] God as the Judge, will he use the indication and revelation of the divine judicial office for the purpose of standing alongside God in a perception of the depths of His wrath as well as His love, and in this divine likeness rejoicing in heaven and earth, in Paradise, and supremely in himself as the only percipient of the goodness of creation? (261-2/296-7)

The prohibition expresses God's will to protect the human being from attempting to occupy an impossible vantage point (261). The responsible free act is performed in the recognition and thankful acceptance of the goods selected and gifted by God.

In scene two, Barth thus sets the perimeters for human agency. Adam is "free to confirm, not himself, but God's decision accomplished in and with his creation." His freedom "is simply the freedom to be humble; his capacity to recognise and to praise the divine judicial office; his ability to side with God without assuming, even if only secondarily, a right of control" (265). In scene three Barth locates the first free human act in Adam's recognition and naming of Eve.

When making explicit the prefigurative significance of this Edenic scene, Barth declares that any Israelite reader would recognize several parallels between this account and Israel's relation to Canaan. First, like Eden the land of Canaan is divinely selected by and gifted to Israel, as the sanctuary "where God in all His hiddenness was so revealed and so hidden in His

revelation” (268). Second, God’s placement of Adam in the garden corresponds to God’s placement of Israel within Canaan: like Abraham, both are taken from outside and moved within (268). Finally, the two trees are a type for the order in which Yahweh will encounter Israel. The tree of life is the sign of God’s election of Israel as a nation and thus of God’s activity in covenant history. This gift of election imposes only the obligation that Israel continually recognize and accept with gratitude God’s good gift. The second tree represents this obligation (269-71). The dogmatician must gaze further into covenant history to see signified in the two trees the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, which realizes the divinely intended fellowship between God and the human being described in Genesis 2 (275-6).

While Barth focuses on the relationship of these trees to Israel’s and Christ’s history, he nevertheless recognizes here an implicit and assumed general anthropology, a type and order of the way in which Yahweh will encounter the human being (272-3). Barth sees in Adam a model of proper human freedom, however Barth does not want to say that the narrative’s anthropological theme (its model of human freedom) is the direct concern of the narrator, for that would suggest a narrator who is preoccupied with human activity rather than divine activity, with anthropology rather than theology. Barth suggests instead that a general anthropology emerges only indirectly from the narrator’s fixation on divine activity, a point that we be central to Barth’s construction of a theological anthropology in III/2. Divine activity assumes the corresponding human activity that Adam models. Adam models this activity in the final scene of Genesis 2, as he responds to the divine selection and gifting of Eve.

ORIGINATING EVE: ADAM'S SEARCH, RECOGNITION, AND FREE DECISION

In the final scene of the creation saga, all other actors, coworkers, and signs fade from view as a solitary and incomplete Adam seeks and is gifted a helper and partner for the fulfillment of the duty allotted to him (290), specifically one in whom he can see himself but one who also differs from him. The divine protagonist retains the central focus as God leads Adam on a search for this partner, bringing to him animals in which he cannot recognize his helper,³¹ before creating a companion from Adam's own body and presenting her to Adam to recognize and accept. Adam's activity comes into view always in response to God's presentations, first as he rejects those in whom he does not recognize his partner, and then as he declares his recognition of his partner in his naming of Eve.

Scene Three (Gen. 2:18-25): Eve Taken from and Gifted to Adam

For Adam's search for a companion to be completed, God must create once again from material that has no capacity in itself to produce what is required. Like the barren earth, Adam is incapable of generating the human life that God constructs from him, just as he is incapable of discerning for himself the good thing that God has chosen for him in Eve. While Adam searches for that which fulfills his need, he seeks always as one who is led by God on this quest. Even as he seeks, he remains ignorant, incapable, and thus utterly dependent on divine initiative for the acquisition of his counterpart.

Barth finds support for this picture of human incapacity in the fact that God puts Adam to sleep before extracting a rib from his side and forming Eve out of it (294-5), and he uses it to gesture to the cognitive limits of both the narrator and the dogmatician. The mystery of divine

³¹ Barth suggests that "partner [*Partner*]" is perhaps the best modern rendering for the term "helpmeet" [*Hilfe*]" (290/331)].

decision and provision are pictured both in Adam's sleep and in the anthropomorphic imagery of God's creative work with Adam's rib. Barth suggests that the narrator, in resorting to seemingly crude anthropomorphisms, is no more capable of understanding the divine creative decision and activity than is Adam, who must sleep in order for God to select and provide a partner for him. Adam's sleep and the mystery surrounding the divine provision of Eve bring us to the heart of this narrative's prefiguration of creation history. Barth tells us that Adam is ignorant as to what it is precisely that he lacks, and he is ignorant of the manner of Eve's origin, for he is not a witness to the creation of Eve, any more than he is to the creation of the heavens and earth. This ignorance, Barth suggests, mirrors that of the biblical narrator in relation to "creation history," an ignorance that is key to Barth's understanding of "biblical saga" itself, one of the hallmarks of which is the imaginative use of anthropomorphic language, an issue I attended to in my previous chapter (296-7).³² I will recall this appeal to cognitive limits when we turn shortly to Barth's discussion of the narrative silence surrounding the presentation of Eve to Adam.

Eve's construction out of Adam's rib communicates much to Barth about what he and Adam are to know and recognize in Eve when she is finally presented to him. The gifting of Eve is "the divine initiative and attack upon solitary man" (302), which exposes his dependent relation on this other human being in order to be what he is. Barth evokes the parallel origin of Adam from the earth to note that in both stories of origin, God fashions something new out of the old (297-8). The source has no merit that makes it suitable for what God creates (302). Adam must recognize that he depends on Eve in order to be completed as a human being. He cannot be

³² With God as prime actor in this gift exchange, Barth emphasizes Adam's incapacity and inability to provide the need that must be met. At this juncture (in the very construction of Eve) Adam "did not actively participate in the creation of woman and therefore in the completion of his own creation. He did not even know positively what it was that he lacked within the rest of creation. It was not he who thought of woman as his helpmeet. He was just unsatisfied" (294). His own failure to find a partner did not enable him to identify, know the nature of, or produce the appropriate partner; he is at the limits of his knowing (294-7).

himself without her (297). In her he must recognize a part of himself (bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh), but one who, while from himself, is at the same time not identical to him, “a being with its own autonomous nature and structure,” who cannot be ruled like a part of his own body (296). Here then Barth continues to constrain the male subject’s fantasy of uniqueness, autonomy, and self-sufficiency. Significantly for Barth’s christo-figurations, Adam must also, in recognizing Eve, recall the cost, suffering, and wound with which he acquires her, the bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh:

He experienced a loss. He is no longer wholly himself, but has had to yield a part or member of his body. Is it not really death which has befallen him? But he does not have to die. He does not have to suffer because of his loss. He bears no wound, not even a cicatrised wound. He has not ceased to be wholly himself because woman was taken out of and from him. Indeed, is it not only now in contrast to woman, in whom he recognises something of himself, that he is wholly man, as man in relationship to woman? (297)

Adam, the triumphant hope-giving sign of life to the dead earth, is himself threatened by, yet sustained against, death in the construction of Eve, herself a sign of God’s will to sustain life against the threat of death.

The naming of Eve is the event in which Adam declares his recognition of God’s gift of a companion, and it is here that Barth makes the revelatory structure of the gifting of Eve explicit. God’s activity continues to take center stage. God is the actor who brought the animals to Adam, put Adam to sleep, constructed Eve from a rib, and now God acts again by presenting Eve to Adam. God does not leave her for Adam to discover on his own. For all Adam’s earlier seeking among the animals, he must nevertheless await God’s activity if he is to receive what he needs. Furthermore, he must depend on God for his ability to recognize her, for in naming the animals Adam was not sure of what he was seeking and knew only that he had not yet found it. The mystery of Eve’s origin from Adam’s rib depicts the mystery of the revelatory event, and God’s presentation of Eve to Adam depicts the noetic moment of that event. Eve is the creaturely

medium that reveals in her being God's gracious provision.³³ Adam's response (his naming of Eve) models the only role Barth grants to the human subject in the revelatory event. Only in "the declaration of his free choice and decision" does Adam (and only Adam) actively participate in his own completion, as he utters "his responsible Yes to what God has willed and done": "He must be present with his knowledge and confession at the completion of his own creation. He must recognise and welcome the woman who will be the true helpmeet now given to him" (298). Adam thus models in this moment Barth's norm for human freedom.³⁴ "Man was the man created by God and endowed by God with freedom" (299), and in the exercise of this freedom he can only say yes to the gift he now recognizes to be what the animals were not. And as the object of this choice and recognition, as that which completes Adam, Barth is confident that woman could not possibly have arrived on the scene with greater honor (299).

Barth observes that in this event of recognition [*Erkenntnis*] Adam finds his human "Thou, " yet we do not have a scene of sexually differentiated I/Thou encounter, for Adam does not speak directly to Eve nor does she respond to his speech. Instead Adam vocally confesses his acknowledgment of this gift directly to God in her presence, about her, and on her behalf. We

³³ "Calvin was right again when he observed that it was not of himself but *ex arcana revelatione Dei* that man spoke of himself as we now hear him speak. It was not he who brought it about that "this" is his helpmeet, "bone of his bones, and flesh of his flesh," and is thus to be called and to be "woman." And as he has not done it himself, he does not know it himself, but speaks prophetically when he makes this confession. But it is in his own freedom that he speaks prophetically, repeating what he has not discovered of himself, but what God has revealed to him in and with his accomplished work as the necessary positive affirmation of his humanity. It is in fact the companion created for him by God, and now introduced to him, who now speaks for herself by her being and existence, i.e., by her ἀναστοφὴ ἄνευ λόγου as the κρυπτὸς τῆς καρδίας ἄνθρωπος ἐν ῥῷ ἀφθάρτῳ τοῦ πραέος καὶ ἡσυχίου πνεύματος, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ πολυτελής (1 Pet. 3^{1f.}) in the σιγῇ (1 Cor. 14³⁴) and ἡσυχία (1 Tim. 2¹²), in which the New Testament does not see a lack but the distinctive features of woman. The *arcana revelatio* which man perceives and reproduces according to v. 23 is this still, quiet, soft and silent message of the work finished and presented by God. Woman created by God and brought to man reveals herself by her existence. She convinces by her presence. She cannot be mistaken, but can be recognised without any effort on her part" (327/374).

³⁴ "The recognition of the I in the Thou which rests on this recognition is possible only in freedom, and it is by a free word that this recognition must be revealed as a responsible decision" (292)/"Erkenntnis des Ich im Du und Alles, was sich auf diese Erkenntnis gründet, ist ja nur in Freiheit möglich, und es ist das freie Wort, in welchem gerade diese Erkenntnis als verantwortliche Entscheidung offenbar werden muß" (233).

have here, says Barth, the pre-history of that history of the I/Thou relation between men and women. It is the sign that points to and prefigures the “creation history” in which the relation between men and women plays out.³⁵ In this free profession of faith “the being of man becomes being in the encounter, in which man receives and will always have a neighbour [*Nächsten*]. His last objective assertion [*Feststellung*] about another becomes his subjective confession [*Bekennntnis*] of *this* other” (300/343).

Although most read this section in relation to Barth’s III/2, §45. 2 description of the I/Thou relation, Barth’s reading of the Good Samaritan in §18 is a more useful site of comparison. As I noted earlier, a comparison to the I/Thou relation of III/2 tends to shift focus to what does *not* take place between Adam and Eve (the interaction between I and Thou), and as a result interpreters have overlooked the way Barth constructs the gifting of Eve as a revelatory event, a gift that imposes an obligation. In Barth’s reading of the parable, the neighbor (the Good Samaritan) has a function analogous to that of Eve. In both the parable and the creation scene, Barth focuses on the orientation and ordering of the human “I” in relation to the divine gifting of the neighbor-“Thou.”

In §18 Barth depicts the human subject’s love of and search for the neighbor as the outer sign of the inner love of and search for God. The encounter with the neighbor is structured as a revelatory event that gifts a benefit to the subject and imposes the obligation of imitating the neighbor’s aid. The self (modeled by the suffering and fallen Israelite) is to gratefully recognize and receive the benefit of the neighbor (modeled by the anything-but-needy Samaritan-benefactor), and the self must also imitate the benefactor by seeking to play the neighbor to

³⁵ “What constitutes this climax is not the fact that man says Yes to woman, but that in this affirmation he says Yes to God in the presence of woman. It is in this way that he really welcomes and receives her. It is in this way that he honours her as the one whom he will now be able to address as ‘thou,’ and before whom he will commence to say ‘I’” (300).

another in turn. Barth uses sacramental language to configure this search in which one is to find and be a neighbor: it is the outward side of the inner reality of the search for God, a search that finds its temporal and material orientation in its direction toward the neighbor. While it is a human effort of ceaseless activity, this search nevertheless depends on God's activity both in selecting the neighbor and enabling the subject to recognize God's provision in that neighbor. As a revelatory event this selection and presentation reflects to the self his or her own neediness and points the self to Christ, who meets this need. The parable's fallen Israelite and wealthy Samaritan stand in a dialectical relation in their function as mirror and sign to the reader. The fallen Israelite reflects the self's neediness and dependency while pointing to the suffering and needy humanity of Christ. The wealthy Samaritan benefactor points to the divinity of Christ and the benefit Christ confers, while at the same time imposing on the self the obligation to imitate Christ's aid to another. Thus, Christ himself is the neighbor that the reader is to recognize and imitate in the verbal witness of the Lucan narrator. The Lucan narrator, in telling the story, is a neighbor to the reader and imposes the obligation on the reader to play the neighbor to another by imitating Christ. Barth in turn imitates the narrator in his own re-description and exposition of the parable, by playing neighbor to his own readers. Having received a benefit from the Lucan narrator, he gives in kind.

There are suggestive similarities in Barth's construal of the relation of Eve to Adam. In his depiction of Adam's search for and receipt of Eve we might be reminded of the ethical agent of §18, who is redirected out of isolation by that divinely selected "other." This "other" is recognized as God's gift only because God acts to enable this recognition. This "other" must be sought after and imitated in turn. We might, therefore, expect Eve to occupy a role akin to that of the Good Samaritan benefactor. A wounded, needy lonely Adam resembles the fallen Israelite

who must first encounter those who do not help him before he is aided by the anything-but-needy Eve, his own Good Samaritan. Having benefited from this gift, we might expect Adam to imitate Eve's service in turn.

We shall see shortly that Eve does share some of these features of the Good Samaritan, for Barth will declare that she is already human from the start, in no need of completion in her function as the completion of Adam's own humanity, and she is brought into the story with great honor. Yet she will also lack crucial features, most notable among them, activity itself. For unlike the Good Samaritan and Adam's many other creaturely co-workers, the benefit Eve renders requires no activity on her part at all, and Barth makes much of this point.

Another notable difference is that unlike the Good Samaritan, Barth does not suggest that Eve herself is a sign of Christ. Barth depicts Adam as a type of Christ, whose wounded state and neediness point to the suffering humanity of Christ (thus resembling the fallen Israelite). We might then expect that Eve in her glory and completeness will figure Christ in his divinity and glory, as did the Good Samaritan. However, Barth does not make this move. In Genesis 2, Adam prefigures both Christ's humility and his glory (his humanity and his divinity), whereas Eve is linked to two communities, Israel and the Church, which cannot be attributed the sort of singular human agency that the Good Samaritan, the fallen Israelite, and Christ retain. Yet from the perspective of §18, it is surprising that Eve, in her role as that revelatory medium that prepares Adam for grace and redirects him out of lonely isolation, occupies an agentially subordinated status and in doing so is the mirror wherein Barth recognizes the male alone as the type of Christ.

Barth's reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan thus exposes some idiosyncrasies that arise in Barth's thinking when the paradigmatically male subject encounters his female other. It also suggests an alternate interpretation of Eve that he might have readily taken. In the

following section we will see that these idiosyncrasies are all put to the service of subordinating Eve to Adam. At this point in Barth's retelling of the narrative, we arrive at the heart of Barth's gender trouble, for his depiction of Eve will provide the narrative template for the normative description of the leading, initiating, inspiring, commanding man and the self-restraining, following, obedient woman. The tensions I expose here will recur in both III/2 and III/4, whenever Barth attempts to assert the full humanity and dignity of women while simultaneously subordinating them to men.³⁶

Silencing Eve

The most noteworthy feature of Barth's depiction of Eve is her inactivity. Eve says and does nothing at all. Compared to Adam she represents a highly truncated version of Barth's model agent. Much that is problematic in Barth's reading of Eve in Genesis 2 is captured in the definition of woman that Barth produces from the narrative: "The simplest and most comprehensive definition of woman is that she is the being to which man, himself becoming male, can and must say in the exercise of his freedom that 'this' is now the helpmeet which otherwise he had sought in vain but which had now been fashioned and brought by God" (300-

³⁶ See Ch. 2, fn. 51 and 53 for similarities and differences between Barth's depiction of the relationship between Adam and Eve and that of Vischer (*The Witness of the Old Testament to Christ*, esp. 47-59) and Bonhoeffer (*Creation and Fall*). Barth draws positively from both of these works. Bonhoeffer and Vischer do not attempt to use the relationship between Adam and Eve in Gen. 1-2 to argue for the subordination between women and men. They suggest a reciprocal relationship between the two, and Vischer evokes Songs 2:26 toward that end. Thus they find in the encounter between Adam and Eve a biblical clue to the relational orientation of human existence. Calvin also sees this relational principle in the arrival of Eve although he does not equate it with the imago Dei. See Susan E. Schreiner (*The Theater of his Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* [Durham, NC: Labyrinth, 1991], 87-88) for a discussion of Calvin's view of the significance of Eve. While Calvin does not develop the relational implications of Eve's arrival, he does see in her arrival the general principle that man was formed to be a social animal: that human beings have a natural impulse toward the formation of society which inclines people to care for the human race as a whole. God created Eve so that there might be human beings on the earth who cultivate mutual society among themselves. In this respect Eve's arrival in Gen. 2 marks the beginning of human society.

01/343).³⁷ A striking feature of this definition is, of course, the male perspective from which it is given and the central place that male activity takes in this definition alongside divine activity. While Eve's activity might be suggested in her scriptural designation within this definition as "Hilfe," in this definition and Barth's reading of the narrative, she neither acts nor speaks, and Barth is keen to emphasize this point.

Eve is not addressed directly by either God or Adam, which means for Barth that she is simply silent, the motionless medium of a divine-human exchange. Barth finds in her silence the biblical portrait of a voiceless inactive-activity that secures male initiative:

She does not choose; she is chosen. She is not asked to decide between the beasts and man....*Thus she is not called upon first to prove her humanity or to confirm it by any special recognition or confession.* Being herself the completion of man's humanity, she has no need of a further completion of her own. Her Yes in this matter is anticipated [*vorweggenommen*] by that of the man, which as we have seen is not directed to her but to God, but which as regards content is uttered with her in view. *His recognition [Erkenntnis] and acknowledgment [Bekanntnis] imply [implizieren] hers as well. As man chooses her, she has chosen him.* For as God has made her out of and for man, as man has to confirm this by his choice and explanation, she is this, and in her case the question of choice or explanation does not arise....*She chooses that for which God has chosen her. She thus chooses herself by refraining from choice; by finding herself surrounded and sustained by the joyful choice of the man, as his elect.* (303/347-8; italics are mine)

In Barth's retelling, narrative silence becomes Eve's silent assent to another's decision and speech on her behalf. Barth's gaze pierces the silence of both narrator and Eve to find a decision to refrain from decision, and thus from a counter-election and Godward profession of faith so proper to Barth's normative model of human agency. In §18 Barth made much of the inaccessibility of the neighbor's decision and self-awareness, but the obscurity and inaccessibility of the other is missing here, as is the role that the neighbor's activity plays, in reflecting the activity of the self and pointing to the activity of Christ. While Adam's sleep might

³⁷ "Das ist die schlichteste und umfassendste Definition der Frau; sie ist dasjenige Wesen, zu dem der Mensch, indem er eben damit seinerseits zum Manne wird, im Gebrauch seiner menschlichen Freiheit sagen kann und muß: 'Diese nun endlich', die sonst vergeblich gesuchte, von Gott aber für ihn geschaffene und ihm zugeführte 'Hilfe, die ihm ein Gegenüber sei'" (KD, 343).

present to Barth the cognitive limits of human access to the activity of the “other,” Eve’s silence does not. Eve’s silence functions instead for Barth as a clue to a biblical view of female identity. As a revelatory medium she is rendered self-evident to Adam and is recognized as God’s gift through no activity on her part. In view of this “still, quiet, soft and silent message [*stille, ruhige, sanfte, schweigende Botschaft*] of the work finished and presented by God,” Barth detects “the σιγή [silence] (1 Cor. 14.34) and ἡσυχία [quiet] (1 Tim. 212), in which the New Testament does not see a lack but the distinctive features of woman” (327/374). I will return shortly to this brief and passing reference to what Barth imagines is a New Testament vision of female specificity.

Eve’s silent immobility is striking when we consider that throughout *Dogmatics* divine and human being is configured in terms of activity; that human agency is enacted as the seeking, recognizing, and confessing of divine initiative. In §18 the activity of the neighbor is a mirror and sign to the self (unsettling the self in its self-sufficiency and isolation, exposing the futility of its self-sustaining efforts), and it is this aid that imposes the obligation on the self to respond in kind and give aid to another. Eve lacks key features in Barth’s account of a specifically human agency, one that seeks, recognizes and declares the gifts of God.³⁸

³⁸ For an insightful analysis of the perspective of the masculine subject from which the silent Eve is constructed see Rachel Muers, “The Mute Cannot Keep Silent: Barth, von Balthasar, and Irigaray on the construction of women’s silence,” in *Challenging Women’s Orthodoxies in the Context of Faith*, ed. Susan Frank Parsons (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 109-120. Muers argues that Barth develops gender difference through the silence of women. In order for silence to function as Barth wants it to, it must be an act of keeping silent (hence Eve’s silence is her choice to keep silent), rather than the result of muteness. He thus constructs woman as the bearer or embodiment of silence. Eve is made to give an unheard consent to her own silencing. She notes several tensions in Barth’s discussion here: woman is an object-to-be-talked-about, by definition excluded from speech, yet at the same time, she is to be a fully human subject in order to meet the terms of his anthropology; woman is inexplicable (her silence indicates her mystery and irreducible otherness) and at the same time fully explainable (for in spite of her mystery Barth attempts to give full explanation of the significance of her silence, making it transparent to the male gaze) (111-2). To Muers’s analysis I would add that Eve, in this silence and its mystery, is constructed as a revelatory medium. This is striking when we consider that in Barth’s doctrine of revelation the revelatory medium is most often the speech of other human beings as witnesses to Christ (whether the voices of biblical authors or the voices of those who proclaim Christ in the church). Greene-McCreight (*Ad Litteram* 1999) discusses the function of narrative silences in Barth’s plain sense reading of Gen. 1-2, although she does not mention the meaning Barth finds in the text’s lack of any reference to activity or speech on Eve’s part in Gen. 2.

Within Barth's reading of Genesis 2, Eve's silence and immobility is striking not only in comparison to Adam's activity, but also in comparison to the other non-human actors that populate Barth's retelling. Mist, river, plant life, and the barren earth, all serve as signs of God's grace to Adam precisely in their activity. And Adam is likewise a sign to them in his active service. He recognizes in their activity of service a reflection of what God intends for his own activity. In such a network of co-actors and co-signs it is indeed peculiar that activity, speech, and choice should be dispensable for the role Eve must serve in the scene of recognition. The male, who must escape his isolation by finding a companion most like him, now recognizes himself (learns something of what it is to be human) in the face of a static and silent mirror. We will see shortly that Barth is not completely comfortable with an inanimate female counterpart. He will appeal to the Song of Songs for a supplemental account with which to animate Eve so as to configure woman as a seeking speaking actor. But before doing so he uses narrative silence to secure a subordinate agential status for Adam's female companion.

Barth secures Eve's agential subordination not only by exploiting her silence, but also by appealing to her origination from Adam's body. She is taken from his body and gifted to him as the servant he needs in order to be completely human (303/346). Her name ('isha) means that she is "of man" and thus belongs to him and is created for his sake, as his glory (301-2). For Barth, these features of the narrative indicate that the relationship between Adam and Eve is not reciprocal and that she is second to him in an agential order that Barth does not attempt to describe.

When securing this point, however, Barth is forgetful of the analogous comments he made earlier in regard to Adam's origin from the earth. Adam is also taken from the earth and presented to it as its completion, its helper, and its glory. Adam's name (*Adamah*) points to his

own origin from the earth and indicates that he belongs to it and is created for its sake (244).³⁹ In spite of these parallels, Adam is not said to be subordinated to the earth in an irreversible order, even though he is to serve it and eventually return to it. Rather Barth finds a reversal in the order of service between Adam and earth when he declares that the earth is ordained to serve Adam, just as Adam is ordained to serve the earth (250-1). Barth uses Adam's humble origin and dependency to restrain and place limits on his exalted status as sign of the humbled yet exalted Christ. While Eve's status as the origination and completion of Adam means her subordination to him, Adam's origination from and completion of the earth mean that he is a sign of the "triumph" of life over the aridity of the dust, a sign of God's will to sustain life over the threat of death, a sign of Christ. Barth says nothing of the sort of Eve, although we might expect it when he says that God inflicts Adam with a mortal wound when extracting his rib, an injury that does not succeed in killing him because God's activity preserves him.⁴⁰ Would she not then also be a

³⁹ Comparing these two passages (one on Adam's origin and name and the other on Eve's), we see that only when it comes to the origin of woman does Barth import the language of order, superiority, and lack of reciprocity into otherwise analogous relations of origin, dependence, and service. And in spite of all that is said of Adam here, he will still emerge the pinnacle of creation (with Eve subordinated to him)—the glory of God as he is the glory of creation. Of Adam he writes:

That *adam* is taken and formed from the dust of the *adamah* testifies in the first instance that he belongs to it. *Adamah* is the earth as cultivated land, the field. Adam thus means man of the earth or field or soil, the husbandman. In Latin, too, *homo* derives from *humus*. According to v. 5, this name must primarily mean that man is destined for the earth, for its service, i.e., its cultivation. But there is also the more precise meaning that he is himself of the earth, that he is taken from it by God's creative act, that he is formed out of the earth, that he is distinguished from the rest of the earth. Hence he is not really *the* creature but one creature in the totality of the creaturely world. He is not really a being of a higher order descended, as it were, from heaven to the nether world. (244)

Compare this to what he says of Eve's name:

What it does mean is that in her being and existence she belongs to him; that she is ordained to be his helpmeet; that without detriment to her independence she is the part of him which was lost and is found again—"taken out of him." It is proper to her to be beside him. This is her humanity, and in this place and the consequent form it is no less than that of man but surpasses it in a definite and decisive respect, although she surrenders and forfeits it if she tries to exchange it for that of man. The fact that the relationship is not one of reciprocity and equality, that man was not taken out of woman but woman out of man, that primarily he does not belong to her but she to him, and that he thus belongs to her only secondarily, must not be misunderstood. The supremacy of man is not a question of value, dignity or honour, but of order. (301-2)

⁴⁰ Barth makes much of a necessary mortal wounding of Adam for Eve to emerge, and without doubt he has in mind Christ's wounded body: "The saga makes this point by telling how God took from him a rib without any activity on his own part and even at the risk of death (for he lies in a deep sleep and a mortal wound is apparently inflicted on

sign of God's will to sustain life over against the threat of death and as such a prefiguration of Christ? As fond as Barth is for analogies he is silent on this correspondence, for it could only compromise the ordering of the sexes that he wants to secure in this narrative.

Rather than drawing attention to the various ways in which his construal of Adam's relation to earth corresponds to his construal of Eve's relation to Adam, Barth effaces the correspondence by instead naming Adam the glory of God (not of the earth) and Eve the glory of Adam.⁴¹ He does this by evoking I Corinthians 11:7 ("For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man" NASB).

She is his glory as he himself is the glory of God (1 Cor. 11.7) [*Sie ist seine Ehre, wie er selbst (1. Kor. 11, 7) die Ehre Gottes ist*]. Without her he would be without glory. Without her he could not be the glory of God. It is the peculiar glory of her creation, i.e., that she was "taken out of man," that she completes the creation of man from man himself and that this is crowned by his own recognition and confession-it is this distinction, insurpassable in its own way, which, not for her humiliation but her exaltation, specifically and inexorably assigns her to this position. Only in this position does she possess her true humanity, but in this position she really does possess it. (303/346)

him)" (296); "Is it not really death which has befallen him? But he does not have to die. He does not have to suffer because of his loss. He bears no wound, not even a cicatrised wound" (296); "At the sight of her, God caused man to think of a grievous wound inflicted on him but also healed; of the nearness of death but also-and much more so-of protection from death" (299); "For his completion God causes him to fall into a deep sleep in which a part is taken out of him by the infliction of a mortal wound" (302); "It is, of course, a strange honour. It came by God's initiative and attack. Without even being asked, man had to yield up something of what belonged to him by divine and natural right. He had to allow the infliction on himself of a mortal wound. For one who was not a lump of dead earth but a living soul it entailed sacrifice, pain and mortal peril as God marched to this climax of His work. God spared him, and yet the strange mixture of the perfect joy of finding and the never-absent pain of deprivation in his relationship to woman is the constant reminder of that from which he was spared. Woman is his great but also his strange glory" (302); "To receive in her his helpmeet, he must suffer, but in the mercy of God not to his destruction. A deadly wound must be inflicted, but it must at once be healed" (326).

⁴¹ While Barth notes an analogy between these two relations (earth/Adam and Adam/Eve), he does not find ordering and subordination to be part of the analogy, only Adam's inability in the face of divine initiative : "It is to be noted that there is an analogy here to his own creation. As he was taken out of the earth, so now at the creation of the woman, in which his own creation is completed, he is himself what the earth was in his own case-the material which quite apart from its merits or suitability is used by God for His work and impressed into His service. What is meant by the statement that woman "was taken out of Man" is that God willed to complete man of and through himself irrespective of any capacity of his own. In this way man receives an incomprehensible honour and distinction, and woman is this honour of his in her own person" (309).

This is a dubious interpretation on Barth's own terms, first, because it elides his interpretation of Adam's relation to the earth, from which he is taken and to which he is gifted by God. The effect, of course, is to replace the earth with God and thereby align Adam's activity with divine activity.⁴² Second, by evoking imagery of creaturely need and incompleteness operative in his reading of the entire narrative, it implies that Adam, the glory of God, is thus also in some sense the completion of God. This is not a correspondence Barth would ever admit to (even if he unwittingly implies it for a moment in his efforts to grant Adam a distinctive status over and against Eve). Barth's God would not be in some sense lacking and in need of completion through a creaturely being such as Adam, nor would God be without glory if without this human Adam. In Barth's analogical framework, the Father would find his glory and completion in the Son, God *ad intra* in God *ad extra*, but not God in Adam—only God in the Christ (the *imago Dei*) whom Adam prefigures but is never identical to.⁴³ Underlying this interpretive slide is the prefigurative

⁴² Earlier Barth repeats the same slide between earth and God when he states: "Woman is as little asked about her attitude to man as was solitary man about his attitude to God when after his formation from the dust of the earth God animated him by His breath" (303). The analogous observation ought rather to be that Adam is not asked about his attitude toward the earth to which he is gifted as servant, any more than Eve is about her attitude toward Adam, a point that apparently does not merit mention nor does it trouble Adam's position in relation to the earth as the sign of Christ.

⁴³ When Barth depicts creaturely entities in need of further completion by divine activity he focuses specifically on divine activity as it manifests the divine glory of God's will and love. I have followed Barth's consistent focus on the divine activity as it moves through successive stages of creation history, each completing the other, and in doing so moving towards the fulfillment of God's intent, while at the same time prefiguring God's covenant history as the far end of God's intent. This movement (through creation, and beyond creation into covenant history) is itself the manifestation of divine glory, as Barth frequently indicates. Divine glory internal to the triune life overflows graciously in God's decision to create and establish and complete a history with creaturely life in the person of the incarnate Christ (68, 70, 95). Creation history thus reveals God's glory in its various stages and entities (42, 43), and God attributes to the human and its world a glory in the likeness of God's future glory (51), imparting his glory to a creature of dust and ash in the Son (55). And so with his focus on divine activity and divine glory Barth declares:

Creation, then, does not aim at the kingdom, the power and the glory of man. It does not aim at the government, the building of cities, the wars and lion hunting of any hero or potentate. Its aim is the history of the acts of God in the world created and controlled by Him and in relation to the man created and guided by Him. In this way it is an original and typical reflection of the purpose and plan and triumph of God, and not of the ambiguities of man's experiences and possibilities of the advent of his kingdom, of the glorification of his name, and of the successes and adventures to which he looks forward when the storms subside. (90)

With all of this in view, the talk of glory and completion within the movement of creation history is for Barth a manifestation and fulfillment of divine will and intent (not human will intent and activity). Thus, following Barth's

function Barth wants to assign to Adam, who alone is to prefigure Christ in this narrative. To suggest that Eve does the same would undermine his efforts to subordinate her to him. In securing this prefigurative function for Adam alone he seeks to secure an agential precedence for Adam (and all men with him) that corresponds to the precedence that Christ has over his community.

In his retelling of the narrative, Barth wants to avoid any place for a reversal in the order of service that might suggest Eve does all that Adam does. Thus while Adam is taken from the earth, ordained to serve it, and in turn receives the service of the earth, Barth finds this sort of reversal to be lacking in the narrative's depiction of Eve's relation to Adam. Adam alone enacts what Barth considers a distinctly male prerogative: he is to seek after and elect his female counterpart, and her part is to consent to be that which he seeks and chooses. Eve's silence and immobility mean for Barth that she consents to his initiative and his preemptive activity.

At the point in the narrative where a reversal might be expected, Barth finds the opposite to be the case. Turning to verse 24 ("For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh" [NASB]) he notes that while one might think that there is finally a dialectical reversal implying a woman in motion, the opposite is the case. In making this point he imagines surprise at what might appear to be the undermining of the male precedence he has hitherto found in the passage:

If what preceded has been carefully read and correctly understood, we are rather startled by this continuation. This description of the being of man and woman is hardly expected immediately after the description of their becoming.....Man is now the follower and adherent of woman, and the two are an absolute unity. We may well ask what has happened to the emphasised supremacy of man. We may well ask in what sense the passage can connect with a "therefore" the becoming in God's creation and this actual

interpretive pattern, Eve as the final act of divine creation, the final stage in its completion, ought to be configured as the fulfillment of the overflow of divine glory in creative activity, with Adam as the preceding stage. And so by appealing to Paul's words in precisely this context, Barth temporarily suspends his own interpretive pattern in order to appropriate divine prerogative and divine glory to the male Adam.

being of the relationship between man and woman? But the contradiction is only in appearance. (304)

He reassures his reader that this is but another iteration of male initiative completely consistent with what he has already described, but one that does have some humbling implications for the male. The male's role (especially in this prefiguration of the human marriage relation) is to seek, desire, and sacrifice for the woman. Woman's part is to leave to him the busywork of seeking, desiring, electing, and speaking. She need only consent to be what he seeks—the completion and glory that he requires. Performing the very initiative he prescribes, Barth preempts any female criticism that might arise at the picture he has painted with the reassurance that, “from this standpoint it may be seen that in practice woman need not fear this pre-eminence,” that “here is thus taken from woman the last pretext for anxiety, self-seeking or rejection” (306). The order prescribed here does not allow him a tyrannical control over her (even if it does deprive her of desire, decision and speech), and so Barth assures her she need not (ought not) defensively assert her own needs, for her needs are to be the focus and concern.⁴⁴

On the one hand then, with the arrival of Eve, Barth continues his work of humbling his model (male) agent. The male subject is not alone, not self-sufficient, and not nearly as unique as he might like to think he is. He is bound in his dependency on and responsibility for the earth, and in this task he is in need of fellow laborers of many sorts. To be fully human he requires a

⁴⁴ “The goal of the whole supremacy shown at this point is his subordination to this arrangement. It is only in this arrangement that it can and will be revealed and validly operative that *he alone is the one who chooses*. Only in the humiliation which he must experience in this event; only in the fact that *as the one who seeks, desires, sacrifices* and is referred to her—he confronts the woman as the weaker partner, can he be her lord and stronger than she. Only in the consummation of this event does he gain and have the right, *in virtue of his free thought and with his free word, to speak for the woman and in the express confirmation of his own humanity to acknowledge hers too*. His whole pre-eminence stands or falls with his assertion of it in the self-determination rooted and grounded in the nature of his actual relationship to woman. From this standpoint it may be seen that in practice woman need not fear this pre-eminence. As man's supremacy by creation is brought into relationship by this ‘therefore’ with the historical reality of love and marriage, man does not really lose anything of what is assigned to him. But he is shown for what purpose it is given. There is thus taken from woman the last pretext for anxiety, self-seeking or rejection. In the simple historical reality of love and marriage there can be no place from either angle for any misunderstanding of its basis in creation” (306, italics are mine).

female counterpart. And to acquire this counterpart he is put to sleep, as God wounds his side and extracts his partner from his own body. He is humbled by the divine injunction that he submit himself to a relationship in which he is so dependent on woman for his being and existence (305).⁴⁵ In these ways Barth reminds the male subject of his dependence on the divine gift-giver and also of his need for other creaturely co-workers to fulfill his duty as sign and servant to the earth. But it now seems that Barth's humbled male subject can more readily tolerate his own relativity in the company of the creaturely coworkers of mist, water, and earth, if he can retain the privilege of sole seeker and chooser in relation to woman, if he can be the primary actor in his own drama, alongside an unthreateningly immobile and silent mirror. For all Barth's efforts to rob the human subject of his self-deifying aspirations, he finds a way for his male subject to parody divine initiative by playing God in turn to his dependent, inactive human other. The seeking, desiring, choosing and acknowledging subject that Barth has described and rhetorically modeled for the reader throughout *Church Dogmatics* becomes decidedly male when turning to relate to his female other. In III/2 and III/4 we will see that Barth's female subject will be expected to perform this passivity in a stance of sustained dependence on male initiative that must (somehow always) preempt her own and in so doing parallel the preemptive divine initiative.

I have here pointed to patterns internal to Barth's reading both of Genesis 2 and of the parable of the Good Samaritan that would suggest a different construal of Eve than the one Barth chooses. In his reading of the parable, the human "other" is a sign of Christ, delivering a benefit and imposing an obligation on the self. Barth's silence on Eve's function as a sign of Christ has

⁴⁵ "His act, then, must really be the act which completes the emergence of man, and *the decision and choice of his free thought and word*. Man's tearing himself away from his roots must not be a rebellious self-emancipation, but the offering of the required sacrifice, the realisation of the autonomy attained and granted at this cost. He must not seek his I but his Thou-his "help meet" (305-6, italics are mine). In the final chapters I will address the question of what this preeminence in decision, choice, free thought, and word leaves woman to "do" if not all this also.

proven suspect by comparison. When Barth shifts from narrative re-description to his explicitly figural reading of this section of Genesis 2 it becomes clear that there is a lot at stake for Barth in which of these two human beings prefigures Christ. Barth's ordering of the relation between men and women depends on the man alone performing this figurative role: Adam prefigures the relationship of Yahweh to the people of Israel, and he prefigures the relationship of Christ to the Christian community. As Barth develops these figural patterns, it becomes clearer that he does not want an inanimate silent figure to be the final word on female agency, even though he requires this of Eve in order to subordinate her to Adam. He eventually puts the female companion of his model agent into motion by aligning Genesis 2 with the Song of Songs. His alignment of Genesis 2, the Song of Songs, and the Ephesians 5 bridal metaphor of Christ's relationship to the Church is a central move that he repeats in his future discussion of sexual difference and, as I will now show, it embeds a tension that will recur in those future discussions. For on the one hand Barth repeatedly claims that women share with men a mutual dependence on and responsibility for the other, wherein they act as fully functioning ethical agents. But on the other hand he will insist on a male initiative that is analogous to divine initiative, while never explaining how this initiative can be performed without undermining the former claim.

Animating Eve

As with the previous two scenes in the Genesis 2 saga, the third scene of "creation history" prefigures the "covenant history" that Barth's narrator has had in view all along. Barth imagines the narrator knows all too well a history in which Israel is always unfaithful to the covenant established by the always-faithful Yahweh. The narrator is also aware of the conflict-ridden character of the fallen relation between men and women. Furthermore, he has in mind a marital

metaphor favored by the prophets: Yahweh is the seeking, desiring, long-suffering husband, who is always faithful to the marital covenant established with an ever-faithless, adulterous-harlot wife—a wife whose desire is always directed elsewhere and so never reciprocates in kind. The flawed and miserable relationship between the sexes that Barth thinks is portrayed in the rest of the Old Testament stands under the shadow of the tragically flawed relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Barth thus claims that throughout the Old Testament the meaning attributed to the relationship between men and women is inseparable from meaning of the covenant relationship of Yahweh to Israel and always gestures in some sense to it. It is this latter relationship that the creation scene of Genesis 2 has in view.

The flawed picture of the encounter between the sexes is, Barth claims, the dominant Old Testament perspective on sexual difference, and it prefigures the tragic covenant history between Yahweh and Israel. In comparison to so negative a view, Barth locates a marginalized and positive perspective in Genesis 2 and the Song of Songs. He sees in these two texts a prophetic anticipation (a promise and prefiguration) of a divinely restored and healed relationship between the sexes, and one that prefigures the eschatological fulfillment of covenant history in the relationship between Christ and the Church. Genesis 2 and the Song of Songs are for Barth a promise of the restoration of order and harmony to the flawed relationship between the sexes, a promise that it too might become a sign of Christ's relation to the Church.⁴⁶ The relationship of man to woman in these two texts prefigures the covenant relationship that God has established with the chosen people and will realize over the course of covenant history, with the coming of

⁴⁶ “When the Old Testament so inexorably describes the relationship between Yahweh and Israel as a disrupted relationship; and when it normally describes the relationship between man and woman only in the light of its disorder and infinite danger, its real aim is the covenant between God and man which in the plan and election of God already included the surrender and death of His Son, which could be accomplished only at this cost, in which God and man, and God and the two sexes, confront each other as do Jesus Christ and His followers to the extent that Jesus Christ had to be offered up for their sins and to die for their reconciliation with God” (322).

the Messiah. In contrast to this picture, the dominant view in the Old Testament is a relationship in which the divinely prescribed order between the sexes is utterly distorted and miserable, entailing “conflicts between the blind dominion of man and the jealous movement for feminine emancipation” (310). With such a picture in view (one that he repeatedly evokes in his future discussions of sexual difference), Barth suggests that the biblical writers take refuge and consolation in conceiving sexual difference in terms of paternity and maternity, rather than in terms of the relational encounter between male and female. A reproductive framework for sexual difference offers the biblical writers the comforting promise of a patrilineage that will produce the Messiah-Son, who will restore the relationship of Yahweh to Israel (315).⁴⁷ It is to this restoration that Paul refers when he depicts the Church as the bride of Christ (Eph 5:25, 32). With the advent of Christ and his Church, patrilineage and sexual reproduction are no longer central features of the relationship between the sexes. Barth claims that Genesis 2 looks forward to this bright future because the relationship between Adam and Eve is not framed in terms of sexual reproduction but instead in terms of the free decision to seek and establish a relationship of fellowship with the opposite sex. He makes the same claim regarding the Song of Songs. In his future discussion of sexual difference he will reiterate this inter-testamental trajectory in his efforts to detach the relationship between the sexes from a reproductive framework.

For all the brevity of his discussion of the Song of Songs, it plays an important role in connecting Genesis 2 with Ephesians 5. Here Barth finally secures a role for female activity, and

⁴⁷ Of the Old Testament picture of the sexual relationship Barth declares: “Its gaze is normally fixed on the centre, on the history of the covenant actualised as a covenant broken and despised by Israel, so that God's faithfulness is necessarily manifested more in threats than promises, in chastisement than rewards, and men and women are better thought of only as fathers and mothers in Israel, and it is comforting to be able to think of them hopefully at least in this direction. In this context it is better to say nothing at all about eros. References to marriage will largely be in the form of warnings and threats against adultery” (315).

at moments his description of the interaction between man and woman seems almost egalitarian in its reciprocity—assigning agential precedence to neither partner. These moments pass quickly:

The Song of Songs is one long description of the rapture, the unquenchable yearning and the restless willingness and readiness, with which both partners in this covenant hasten towards an encounter. Gen. 2 is even more radical in its great brevity. It tells us that only male and female together are man. The male alone is not yet man, for it is not good for him to be alone; nor can the female alone be man, for she is taken out of the man: "They twain shall be one flesh." Hence Gen. 2 speaks of the covenant made and irrevocably sealed. It sets at the beginning that which in the Song of Songs is the goal. It was for the sake of this covenant that God first created man as male and female. And the Song of Songs agrees. With this covenant in view, man and woman must and may and will hasten toward an encounter in spite of any hindrance and restriction. (313/358)

Furthermore Barth is now comfortable with dialectical reversals and with a seeking, desiring, speaking female:

Indeed, we have here a note which cannot be heard in Gen. 2. For woman is now portrayed in the same rapture—one might almost say with the same eager: "This is now"—in relation to man. She now answers just as loudly and expressly as she is addressed by him. She now praises him no less than she is praised by him. It is she who now seeks him with pain and finds him with joy. The famous inversion is now found on her lips: "My beloved is mine, and I am his" (*Song of Sol.* 2¹⁶); "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine" (*Song of Sol.* 6³). (313/358)

Barth thus enlists the Song of Songs to animate his hitherto inanimate Eve, but only after he has used her silence and immobility to secure her subordinate status.

For Barth, the Song of Songs escapes the shadow of the devastated relation between men and women that haunts the rest of the Old Testament. He now suggests this shadow lingers even over Genesis 2 and has something to do with the narrative silence enveloping Eve. In a statement that is surprising after all the normative implications Barth has drawn from Eve's silence and inactivity, he now suggests that her silence is symptomatic of the biblical narrator's awareness of this vexed relationship. Of the dominant negative Old Testament perspective, Barth declares

Its gaze is normally fixed on the centre, on the history of the covenant actualised as a covenant broken and despised by Israel, so that God's faithfulness is necessarily manifested more in threats than promises, in chastisement than rewards, and men and

women are better thought of only as fathers and mothers in Israel, and it is comforting to be able to think of them hopefully at least in this direction. In this context it is better to say nothing at all about eros. References to marriage will largely be in the form of warnings and threats against adultery. In sad contrast to the Song of Songs 2:11f., the winter is not yet passed, the rain is not over and gone, the flowers have not yet appeared on the earth, the time of singing has not yet come. The call: "Arise, my love [*Freundin*], my fair one, and come away," could have only a suspicious, deceptive, lascivious, or at least supremely indifferent, worldly connotation [*nur einen verdächtigen, verführerischen, lasziven oder doch höchst indifferent weltlichen Klang*]. The first woman's welcome [*Begrüßung*] to the first man, and the nakedness and shamelessness of both, are better ignored. The Song of Songs had better not be written, or not read if already written. But the Old Testament does occasionally look in the other direction. Its whole witness to God's covenant is shot through by the knowledge that this centre where it is broken and despised, and persists only in this form, is not the whole story, and that it has its frontiers in a very different beginning and end, where Yahweh and His people are together and are "one flesh." (315/360-1)

For a passing moment the male and female voices in the Song of Songs stand in for Adam and

Eve. Eve's silence conceals her vocal welcome and betrays a male narrator's anxious silence.

With a view to the "covenant history" between the harlot-bride Israel and the faithful husband Yahweh, and with a view also to all that is wrong in the sexual relationship, the narrator does not dare imagine a direct exchange between Adam and Eve. To imagine Adam speak as the groom speaks is to evoke suspect, seductive, lascivious, and profane imagery (as Barth's string of adjectives suggests—*verdächtig, verführerisch, lasziv, weltlich*). To imagine any activity, desire, or seeking on Eve's part is to recall the possibility of adulterous desire, and so the narrator takes refuge in her silence. This hasty move is ambiguous but suggestive, and it further complicates Barth's interpretation of Eve's silence. Previously he rendered her silence transparent, finding in it Eve's choice not to choose or speak for herself—her decision to allow Adam to do all the busywork of seeking, electing, and speaking for her. He will repeat this reading in his future discussions of sexual difference. But for a moment Barth offers an alternate reading when he imagines that the "covenant history" of Yahweh and Israel is so squarely in focus for the narrator that it obscures his ability to imagine a happy relationship in which Eve recognizes Adam and

reciprocates in kind. And perhaps, had Barth incorporated Genesis 3 into his discussion, he might have found further support for this alternate reading. There Eve's activity is directed elsewhere—conversing with a serpent, desiring fruit, seeking divine likeness, and leading Adam along after her on this quest. Barth might also have found in the silence of Eve a reminder of the inaccessibility of the will and desire of the other to the self's perception, knowledge and control.

Thus, for all the normative work that Genesis 2 does for Barth's later prescriptions of a properly ordered relationship between men and women, the narrative does not fully escape the shadowy picture of a devastated sexual relationship long enough to provide a picture of a seeking, desiring, and speaking female subject. However, this does not trouble Barth, for his concern is with divine initiative in relation to human unworthiness and inadequacy. If Adam's failed search and wounded side prefigure Yahweh's long suffering unrequited love for an Israel whose desire is always directed elsewhere, then Eve's silence serves to complete this picture. So Barth writes:

Love is always love even if it is not deserved or reciprocated by the beloved, even if she rejects and disgraces it by unfaithfulness. Similarly, marriage is always marriage even though broken by Yahweh's partner. Yahweh is always the Lover, Bridegroom and Husband. And His lost people is always His beloved, His bride and His wife....We have to reckon with the unfaithfulness of the wife, but never with the unfaithfulness of the Husband. We have to reckon with her rejection and abandonment, but not with a bill of divorce. (316)

In this respect, Eve's silence aids Barth's figural reading of Old Testament covenant history while simultaneously securing support for male initiative. Yet in his efforts here to animate Eve and thus to affirm that women too are fully functioning agents, he undermines the very reading he used to subordinate Eve to Adam. In his future discussions of sexual difference, Barth will continue to show himself to be incapable of providing a coherent account of female agency.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Barth's use of analogical relationships (Adam and Eve, Yahweh and Israel, Christ and Church, Father and Son) do not provide as stable or as fixed a picture of sexual difference and its ordering as Barth likes at times to suggest, for

Ephesians 5:22-33 serves as Barth's commentary on Genesis 2, the Song of Songs, and all of those marital metaphors in the prophets (321-4), and he is sure that full sense cannot be

Barth's focus, in making these analogies, is on the actor who constitutes the relationship (along with its order) and not on order as such. For instance Barth states:

It is true that as a rule at the heart of the Old Testament witness Yahweh's love for Israel is compared with a man's love for a woman who was from the very outset unworthy of Him, whom He raised out of the dust [*Staub*] (Ezek. 161-14), whom He undeservedly honoured by turning to her, and whom He adorned with His gifts. (316/361)

What Barth says of Yahweh's bride better recalls Barth's reading of Adam rather than of Eve. For it is Adam who is taken, from the dust of the earth [*Staub von der Erde*] (KD, 275-8), who as such is "*Staub vom Staube, Erde von der Erde*" (KD, 267), who is showered with the gifts of a garden-home, nourishing plants, and a human companion. Barth does not configure Eve as the recipient of any gifts but as the ultimate gift. Here once again the vantage point of §18 suggests a different construal of Eve. As the human benefactor-neighbor, Eve functions as the sign gifted by the divine benefactor, reflecting God's good will and fellowship toward Adam. Here then, Adam can as readily prefigure the bride of Yahweh as does Eve.

A similar instability can be seen in another passage where Barth aligns Eve's emergence from Adam with the emergence of the "Son of God on earth" from Israel:

It is because it is grounded in the utter mystery of God's deity that He is Yahweh Elohim, the Holy One of Israel, that in the act which completes his humanity man is placed in a deep sleep, and on awakening finds that the divine work has taken place. It is because in and with Israel's election God has from the very first offered, surrendered and sacrificed no less than something of Himself, in some sense hazarding Himself, *so that from the very first the existence of Israel includes in itself the existence of the Son of God on earth*, that the helpmeet of man is "bone of his bones, and flesh of his flesh," earthly as he is, yet not just taken out of the earth but taken out of him, not formed from the earth but "fashioned" out of something which man had to yield and surrender. It is because in free decision God has said Yes to the Israel created not only by but of Himself, to the compromising and jeopardising of His own divine being, that man jubilantly exclaims: "This is now." When a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, when he and she become one flesh, it is because God has so irrevocably united Himself with His people, and so unconditionally declared His solidarity with it, as was the case in the establishment of the covenant, in their "time of youth" together. When man and his wife were naked and not ashamed, it was because the Husband Yahweh, "the Lord of Hosts," *the "Lord of all the earth," had first-really first-revealed Himself wholly as He is to that poor and wicked harlot, just as she for her part was known and revealed to Him in all her utter misery, and because in this mutual but divinely grounded revelation there was nothing but love, good-pleasure and delight*, because the Husband Yahweh was really not ashamed of the harlot Israel, and because He willed to allow and promise her that ultimately she would not have to be ashamed before Him even in all her nakedness. (318-9; italics are mine)

Here, in Barth's series of analogies, Eve for a moment prefigures the Son arising from Israel, and no subordination applies in such a relationship. Furthermore the miserable and lowly harlot referenced in this quote has more in common with Barth's depiction of Adam than his depiction of Eve. For according to Barth, Eve could not have been introduced to the scene with greater honor. She is in no need of completion, and she is the medium of divine revelation (the sign of God's goodwill) to an Adam who is incomplete, needy, lonely, and near death. Adam responds in delight to that revelatory moment in which he recognizes her for what she is.

These two textual moments expose the instability of the dialectics at play in Barth's figural reading of the Gen. 2 narrative. We see here that it is not completely beyond Barth's scope to envision Eve in a position that resembles the Good Samaritan, however his concern to secure male privilege will overrule this openness and instability. He will evoke the three signs (Adam and Eve, Yahweh and Israel, Christ and Church) on a number of occasions later on as a strategy that simplifies a far more complex, far less stable, construal of analogical relations, and one that has given many critics the impression that a static binary of higher/lower, first/second, command/obey pervades Barth's entire analogical edifice. This is a point I will focus on in my next chapter, where I will contest a reading that focuses specifically on such patterns of ordering, at the expense of examining the agent at work in each relationship.

made of the Genesis 2 scene of Eve's creation without it (326). Barth makes no reference to the details of Jesus' life-history as narrated in the Gospels. Jesus's unmarried status must be ignored for the analogy to succeed. His intimate company of twelve men is also to be ignored. With the Gospel narratives tucked out of sight Barth seizes on Paul's marital metaphor and his construal of Christ as second Adam. Adam's sleep and his wounded side prefigure Christ's death on the cross, and Eve prefigures the Church-bride birthed from his death. Adam's awakening from the infliction of a mortal wound prefigures Christ's resurrection.⁴⁹ In these figural readings, Barth does not refer to the origin of Christ's humanity from the virgin Mary, although he might have found a place for it alongside Adam's origin from the dust, Eve's origin from Adam, and Christ's origin from Israel.⁵⁰ While Mary eludes reference, some of her maternal attributes are

⁴⁹ "Why can man jubilantly exclaim: 'This is now ...? Because the Church of Jesus did not first recognise Him but was first recognised by Him, being created for Him by divine omnipotence in the power of His resurrection, and brought to Him, and given Him out of the world; because He was to rediscover Himself in it, in "another," a counterpart; because in its existence His own was to be completed; because with it-only with it, but with it truly-He was to be altogether Himself; because with its service He was to become and be the Lord and King of the whole universe. In and with its election, His own election is complete; in and with its revelation, His own revelation is finally accomplished. Why does a man leave father and mother and cleave to his wife, so that they become one flesh? Because Jesus will leave the glory of His Father for the sake of His own followers; because His mother and brothers and sisters will be those, and only those, who as His followers do His will; and because He will declare His full solidarity with them, genuinely uniting Himself with them" (321-2). Here Eve's silence now means not only her consent but that she recognizes Adam only *after* he first recognizes her. Now Barth imposes a temporal order on the scene of recognition and reads it into Eve's silence. This temporal order will become the peculiar norm for the interaction between men and women: a woman's interaction with a man must continually await his initiating recognition of her. It is little wonder, then, that Eve does not seek. But how does one delay recognition? This is not a question Barth will bother to address.

⁵⁰ Barth's silence regarding maternal imagery and function in general and Mary in particular is striking in view of von Kirschbaum's interest in these themes (*Die wirkliche Frau*, 57-87) and in the connections she draws between Mary and Eve. Writing on the matter in 1948, and thus shortly after the publication of III/1 (1945), von Kirschbaum, like Barth, finds in the virgin birth a countersign to the dominion of the male. She foregrounds Mary's honor in bearing Jesus, finding it to counterbalance Eve's subordination to Adam after the Fall. Comparing her to Barth, Selinger describes von Kirschbaum's interest in scriptural mother figures and the role that both Mary and Eve play for her. Her lecture on the "Mother of All Living" begins with Eve as the scriptural indicator of what motherhood means, and she turns to Gen. 3:16 to argue that the bearing of children in pain must be seen as an instrument of God's grace (Barth's exegesis of Gen. 3:16 ignores the bearing of children and attends only to the dominion of husband over wife). Following Vischer, she compares the history of Israel to a body that hopes and waits for a son (recall that Barth makes a figural connection between Christ-from-Israel and Adam-from-the-earth, but is silent with regard to Christ's origin from Mary). Von Kirschbaum is interested in scriptural women who were barren but conceived after God heard their prayers (Sarah, Rebeca, Rachel), and whose concern for their sons' interests helped secure God's plan. Her biblical figures provide for her a model of spiritual (*geistliche*), rather than biological

appropriated by the figures of the laboring suffering Adam and Christ, as Eve and the bridal-Church take their own existence from each male's wounded body.

The Church of Jesus Christ emerges when He endures the pain of death, allowing a part of His own life to be taken from Him; when it is "formed" from that which is wholly His and which He now surrenders; when it receives from His its own essence and existence. And He in turn receives its flesh, accepting its weakness and making it a part of His own body. (321)

Adam elects and recognizes Eve as a prefiguration of Christ's election and reception of the Church. Barth declares: "Why can man jubilantly exclaim: 'This is now ...? Because the Church of Jesus did not first recognise Him but was first recognised by Him'" (321). Eve's silence now means that she recognizes Adam as the divine gift only after he first recognizes her. Thus Barth imposes a temporal ordering on the revelatory scene of human recognition. In my final chapters, I will show how this temporal order become an unlivable norm for the interaction between men and women, for a woman must continually awaiting a man's initiating recognition and decision in regard to her. From this vantage point, it is little wonder that Eve does not seek or speak, for now she must be animated by the recognition, decision, and address of another. But how does one delay recognition (divinely enabled or otherwise)? This is not a question Barth addresses.

IMAGINING PREGNANT WOMEN AS MODEL AGENTS: ELIZABETH AND MARY

In aligning Genesis 2 with the Song of Songs, Barth makes a move that he will repeat in future discussions of sexual difference. He evokes a biblical text that suggests women are fully functioning agents, doing all that men do. He holds this text alongside biblical texts that suggest

motherhood, for they serve as examples of living hope. All women might then potentially be mothers of the living, and she seeks to configure this activity as a mode of creativity (Selinger, *von Kirshbaum*, 109-115).

women are subordinate to men. Using both texts together he insists that a reciprocal and mutual relationship between men and women (in which each seeks, desires, speaks and comes to the aid of the other) is simultaneously a relationship in which the man initiates and preempts female activity. He does not attempt to integrate the two sets of claims. A contradiction is at the heart of his construal of the relationship between men and women. On the one hand we have a fully functioning agent, seeking, desiring, choosing what God has chosen for her, and on the other hand we have a person who restrains herself in order to allow the male the prerogative of preceding her in precisely this activity—seeking, desiring, and choosing for and on her behalf.

Barth does not always have such trouble animating biblical female figures. Years earlier, Barth delivered a series of lectures on the opening chapters of Luke, in which angels declare the birth of John the Baptist and the birth of Christ. The lectures, published under the title *Dei Verheissung* (and appearing in English as *The Great Promise*), were delivered during the Advent 1934 to an audience of students who had attended Barth's formal lectures and seminars before they were forcibly terminated at University of Bonn in the heat of the German Church crisis.⁵¹ It is an especially suggestive work for my purposes, because in these lectures Mary and Elizabeth are models of the same pattern of agency that Adam enacts in §41. Furthermore, Barth presents them to his audience as models of what theological discourse hopes to be, namely a faithful, discursive response to the hearing of a revelatory address through the medium of a creaturely other. He intends his mostly male audience of would-be theologians to pattern their own theological practices after these two female models.

I draw on this text here because Barth provides the sort of descriptive detail for female agents that he does not give us in his interpretation of Genesis 2 and that he only alludes to in his

⁵¹ Karl Barth, *The Great Promise*, trans. Hans Freund (New York: Philosophical Library, 1963). See the preface for context of lectures (1).

reference to the Song of Songs. When read alongside §41 it is striking in several respects. First, it shows us that he has only one model of agency; both sexes are to appropriate it; female actors can model for male theologians the proper way of appropriating it; and he does not always burden female actors with the agential restraints that he places on Eve. Second, he takes a different approach to the silence of women in the New Testament. He uses a man's silence as an indicator of the absence of faith, while using the speech of these two women to question a literal reading of the I Corinthians 14:34 prescription that women keep silent in the Church. He does not here consider silence to be a distinctively female characteristic in the New Testament as he says it is in §41. Third, Barth is comfortable with drawing attention to pregnant female bodies in his interpretation of Luke 1, in spite of the contemporaneous glorification of maternity within the rhetoric of National Socialism and German Christian theology.⁵² However we shall see that the context is one in which their capacity to conceive in no way undermines the miraculous character of the divine activity that renders pregnancy possible in their specific cases. By drawing attention to these features, I will show that Barth's reading of the first chapter of Luke has much within it that undermines his later efforts to use Adam's relationship to Eve to subordinate women to men. At the same time affinities between his interpretation of these two narratives render all the more conspicuous his silence regarding Mary in §41, for in both narratives he focuses on divine capacity, creaturely incapacity, and the vocal human response of faith.⁵³

⁵² Barth discusses the virgin birth in: *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf. Erster Band: Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes. Prolegomena zur christlichen Dogmatik*, ed. Gerhard Sauter (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1982), 365-7; *Göttingen Dogmatics: Instructions in the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 160-7; *The Great Promise; Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G.T. Thomas (New York: Harper, 1959), 95-100; *CD IV/1*, 207.

⁵³ The literature on the virgin birth in Barth's theology includes: William A. Mueller, "Karl Barth's View of the virgin Birth," *Review and Expositor* 51, no.4 (1954); L. Gordon Tait, "Karl Barth and the Virgin Mary," in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 4 (1967): 406-25; Andrew Louth, *Mary and the Mystery of the Incarnation: An Essay on the Mother of God in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Fairacres: SLG, 1977); Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *An Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979): 26-7; Paul S. Fiddes, "Mary in the theology of Karl

In the first two lectures of *The Great Promise*, the high priest Zechariah is a foil for the faith demonstrated by his wife Elizabeth and by Mary the mother of Christ (2-34). Both Zechariah and Mary are singled out by an angel to hear the promise of a child to be born to them under physically impossible circumstances. Zechariah is told that his wife, whose reproductive years have passed, will conceive a son, who is to be named John, and is to be the forerunner to the Messiah. Mary is told that as a virgin she will conceive a son, the Messiah himself. Barth notes that Zechariah and Mary stand together in a line of biblical “figures of the Advent” to whom angels appear: “those who have received the promise and now wait for the Lord” (18-9). Both respond to the mystery of the angelic promise with fear and incomprehension. Whereas Zechariah speaks his doubt to the angel, asking how such a birth can be possible given the age of his wife (15-16), Mary acknowledges the promise, declaring, “Let it be to me according to your word” (Lk. 1:38) (31-4). Each hears the divine address through an angelic creaturely medium, but one believes and speaks the faithful response, while the other does not believe and instead speaks his doubt.

Barth,” in *Mary in Doctrine and Devotion: papers of the Liverpool Congress, 1989, of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, ed. Alberic Stacpoole (Colelgeville: Liturgical Press, 1990), 111-27; Volker Strümke, “Die Jungfrauengeburt als Geheimnis des Glaubens—ethische Annmerkungen,” *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 49, no.4 (2007): 423-441; Tim Perry, “What is Little Mary Here For?” *Pro Ecclesia* 19, no.1 (Winter 2010): 46-68. The most extensive treatment is Dustin Resch, *A Sign of Mystery: Karl Barth’s Interpretation of the Virgin Birth* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012). Resch focuses on Barth’s efforts to retrieve the doctrine of the virgin Birth from the influential theological and exegetical critiques of Schleiermacher and Strauss. He tracks recurring themes and subtle developments in Barth’s treatment of the doctrine, and he is particular interested in the way Barth configures the relationship of the virgin conception to the incarnation. He finds that, beginning with *The Great Promise* of 1934 and most clearly articulated in I/2, §15, Barth shifts from giving the virgin conception a constitutive role in the incarnation to presenting it as a sign with the purely noetic function of unveiling the identity of Christ. He notes that this development enables Barth to avoid the many criticisms typically directed at the Augustinian approach of the virgin conception, for he can now affirm the virgin birth without having to affirm a particular view of original sin, its transmission, and human sexuality. Resch only briefly describes and does not critically engage the gender assumptions in Barth’s discussion. However Resch does show that by §15 Barth had distanced himself from his earlier appreciation for scholastic discussions of the Holy Spirit’s role in the conception of a sinless Christ, along with their antiquated views of procreation, wherein the female seed receives its form from the male seed.

In the very moment that Zechariah should have professed the promise he has heard to the people around him (thereby becoming a faithful witness), Barth notes that he is instead rendered mute. He can no longer give witness. For Barth, Zechariah's muteness exemplifies the judgment and crisis under which all theological endeavors operate. Theologians might just as well be mute when their words are not the witness of faith but the speech of a disobedient doubter (17). Barth declares, "man has failed; he disgraced himself and must keep quiet" (17). Elizabeth has faith and hope but Zechariah does not (17). In Barth's reading of this narrative, then, silence serves a different function from the one Barth gives it in his later reading of Eve. It is an indicator of the absence of a hearing and vocal acknowledgment of the Word—the failure of human freedom. In Genesis 2, it is indicative of Eve's free consent to allow Adam to play the acknowledging, electing, and speaking agent on her behalf.

As Barth continues to reflect on the Lucan narrative in his third lecture, the pregnant Elizabeth and Mary come together, and Barth presents the moment of their meeting as a scene of reciprocal recognition and vocal, confirming, acknowledgment of the promise of God—precisely what was missing in the scene between Adam and Eve (35-44). Each recognizes in the other a recipient and fulfillment of the divine promise. Each quite literally embodies the fulfillment of the promise, and each addresses the other as such. This scene of joyful recognition and address between the two pregnant women is, for Barth, a picture of Christian fellowship, of the unity of hope in the hearts of those who have received and participate in the divine promise. Noting the realism of the narrative in its reference to the baby leaping in Elizabeth's womb, Barth connects physical pregnancy, the community of the Church, the believer's faith, and creation out of nothing:

Where there are such people who have received the promise, such a Mary and such an Elizabeth, where the *Church* is, there is what is called pregnancy in physical life, there is

expectancy and the presence of what is expected; there is not only a knowledge of grace but there is grace itself. Where the Church is, there is he in the midst of them, there is he who is the hope of the Church, without whom there would be no Church, as little as the world which God has created from nothing. (39)

He notes that Mary's subsequent song of gratitude and praise is a song the church and his audience of theologians should be ready at any moment to sing (48). She and Elizabeth together function as models of confessing faith, each recognizing the work of God in the other.

In the fourth lecture, when Barth arrives at the scene of the circumcision of the infant child born to Elizabeth, he returns again to the figure of Zechariah. Because the mute Zechariah is not able to name his son, the family decides he should be named, according to custom and law, after his father. But "strangely enough the mother interferes, and in spite of all that we might expect from her, proclaims her: 'Not so; he shall be called *John!*'" (58). Barth draws attention to her disruption of convention, her daring to speak where it was not her place. In her refusal to keep silent, she displays her obedience to the angel's command that the promised child be named John. Barth notes the shock registering with the family at this departure from the ordained way of things, and the recurring shock when Zechariah writes on a tablet, agreeing with his wife, that the infant's name should be John. In Zechariah's act of proclamation and obedience to the angelic promise, he regains his voice, and then he, like Mary, professes his faith, gratitude, and joy in a song. Thus Zechariah also finally becomes to Barth's audience an example of theological discourse that is obedient and faithful. A miracle makes Zechariah's faith possible where it is not possible (63), just as a miracle enables a virgin and a postmenopausal woman to conceive.

In commenting on Elizabeth's somewhat abrupt disruption of the authority of family order in the naming ritual, Barth notes that she is the first to proclaim the new name, and Zechariah follows after her by consenting to what she has said (60). He finds it noteworthy that she speaks John's name in obedience to the angel before her husband does:

It is a very peculiar thing about the *woman's* role, just in the first chapter of Luke, a very notable and honorable role! And if it is under discussion whether a woman should have a part in preaching the gospel, such a discussion would have to be preceded by a very thorough exegesis of this chapter before one should be allowed to answer conclusively with reference to I Corinthians 14. Neither Mary with her song of praise nor Elizabeth with her 'Not so!' have kept silence. They have *said* something very decisive in the community and with the community of all time. (60-1)

Barth's ordering of the activity between husband and wife in this narrative, alongside his questioning of a literal interpretation of I Corinthians 14:34, does not fit comfortably with his subordination of a silent Eve to a speaking Adam in Genesis 2.⁵⁴

This earlier text has suggestive implications, for Barth's understanding of female agency, for his objection to maternal imagery, and for the absence of the virgin conception from his figural readings of Genesis 2. First, with regard to agency, we find that Barth is very capable of imaging fully functioning female agents. Like Adam they freely choose and confess what God has chosen for them, and in this way they serve as models of theological speech to a mostly male audience. Zechariah fails to serve as such a model, and his silence is the consequence of his lack

⁵⁴ In "The 'Mother of all living'" (*The Question of Woman*, 121-38), written over a decade after Barth wrote *The Great Promise* and *CD I/2*, and several years after the publication of *III/1*, von Kirschbaum delivers a condensed version of the key points in *The Great Promise* and *I/2*, §15, but with an eye to their implications for the biblical significance of motherhood. Unsurprisingly, her depiction of motherhood follows the same trajectory that Barth gives to procreation in the Old and New Testaments. Her discussion of the significance of Mary's virginity and of her role as a model of faith offers no substantial departures from Barth and is highly dependent, even in its wording, on Barth's language in both texts. Selinger points to minor differences in content between von Kirschbaum's account and Barth's *I/2* depiction of the virgin conception, much of which has to do with the subtle ways in which she positions wording taken directly from Barth (*Charlotte von Kirschbaum*, 110-4), although Selinger surprisingly does not mention von Kirschbaum's paraphrasing of Barth's reading of Lk. 1 and its obvious dependency on Barth's "The Great Promise." Von Kirschbaum's discussion of Mary is incorporated within a longer discussion of Old and New Testament female figures who in various ways take on a maternal role, the significance of which she wants to detach from biological maternity, as does Barth, although (as Selinger argues) she is clearly invested in maintaining some sense of a spiritual maternal role for women. Of interest for my concerns is her failure, like Barth, to integrate her depiction here of the activity of certain biblical female figures with the account of female subordination that she shares with Barth. This is especially evident in her discussion of Old Testament women (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Naomi, Deborah, Zipporah, Abigail) many of whom she describes as initiating moments of encounter with men—seducing men or manipulating circumstances in order to bring men's activity into accord with their own desires and ends, which happen to coincide with God's purposes. Within the context of this series of published lectures her silence on female subordination to male activity when discussing these women is striking because the topic of female subordination appears to be a favorite recurring theme in her lectures. She depicts subordination as a woman's free decision to let a man lead, choose, and decide on her behalf (see esp. *The Question of Woman*, 65-66), something that none of these biblical women "do" (in von Kirschbaum's depiction of them). Like Barth she assures her readers that such an (atrophyed) account of agency does not diminish the dignity of women.

of faith. In their obedience Mary and Elizabeth are anything but silent, which gives Barth cause to question whether women should keep silent in the churches, and here he does not find silence to be a special attribute of female agency in the New Testament as he suggests it is in III/1. When Zechariah is finally obedient his profession of faith follows after and agrees with the preceding proclamation of his wife. In these many ways, then, Barth's interpretation of this narrative is at odds with his latter use of Genesis 2 to subordinate Eve to Adam.

Second, with regard to Barth's aversion to maternal imagery in his reading of Genesis 1-2, it is noteworthy that Barth is comfortable with talking about pregnant female bodies when their capacity to conceive in no way compromises the miracle of the divine act or the creature's incapacity for the work God does with it. Mary's and Elizabeth's pregnancies are the result of a miracle that makes possible what is otherwise impossible (a conceiving virgin and a conceiving post-menopausal woman). In this respect their pregnancies are analogous to the miracle of the revelatory event that makes possible the confession of faith that is otherwise impossible. In this chapter and the preceding one, I have argued that Barth's aversion to maternal imagery in the Genesis creation narratives is due in part to his concern that such imagery might suggest a creaturely capacity for the creative work of God. His interpretation of the first chapter of Luke further supports this claim. It is surprising then, that Barth does not exploit this earlier configuration of the virgin conception when he objects to the way Bonhoeffer and Gunkel link the maternal body to the earth from which God creates Adam (244-5).

Third, with regard to Barth's figural reading of Genesis 2, I have already noted places where the origin of Christ from Mary might have readily fit alongside other analogies. That is, he might have mentioned God's selection of one woman among the many from whom to take the humanity of Christ, and he might have set this scene of origin alongside God's selection of a

clump of earth from which to construct Adam, God's selection of Adam's rib from which to construct Eve, and God's selection of the nation of Israel from which to raise the Messiah. His silence with regard to Christ's physical origin is quite noteworthy, for these earlier texts indicate that Barth does not have a general aversion to talking about mother of Christ and that he is inclined, elsewhere, to connect her conception to God's creative work. It is hard to imagine this analogy never occurred to him, for he gives careful attention to the figure of Mary not only in *The Great Promise* but also in I/2, §15.3, where he insists on the importance of the virgin conception for his christology, and here again he configures the virgin conception as a divine creative act that makes possible what is humanly impossible.⁵⁵ With so many similar themes in

⁵⁵ Barth's discussion of the virgin conception in *CD* I/2, §15 ("The Mystery of Revelation") further demonstrates how important it is to Barth to hold together divine activity and creaturely incapacity when talking of the virgin mother of Christ (see also IV/1, 207). In §15, Barth depicts Mary as an exemplary agent, as he does also in *The Great Promise*, which was written in the same time period. It is not on account of any piety or virtue on her part that she functions in this way. Rather she does so as she accepts and embraces the promise of a divine miracle that makes the impossible possible. In speaking of the virgin conception itself, Barth is not interested in Mary's maternal fecundity or in any aspect of her maternal relationship to Christ. Instead he focuses on the divine act that makes possible a conception that is otherwise impossible, and also on the appropriate human cognitive and discursive acknowledgment of that act. In this way he incorporates the virgin conception into his sustained resistance to theologies that seek to secure in the creature a capacity for God's work. In both §15 and *The Great Promise*, the virgin conception serves as an analogy for faith. In §15 it serves, furthermore, as a sign of the miracle of the incarnation.

Christology is the focus of §15, specifically the doctrine of Christ's two natures, as encapsulated in the creedal formula, "very God very man" (*vere Deus vere homo*). Barth gives the virgin conception a prominent place in this discussion of christology (I/2, 172-202). He has in mind the virgin Mary both as a referent of the creed (*natus ex Maria virgine*) and as a character in the gospel annunciation narrative, but he is preoccupied with the former. Barth argues that the virgin conception is a necessary doctrine because it serves as a sign that points beyond itself to the mystery of the incarnation, the union of the Logos with human nature. It does not explain that mystery, but rather it casts a light on its very inexplicability by foregrounding the utter incapacity of the creature for the work God does with it. Barth draws analogies between 1) the incapacity of Christ's human nature for its union with the Logos, 2) Mary's incapacity to conceive without a male partner, and 3) the reader's incapacity to acknowledge [*Anerkenntnis*] and confess [*Bekentnis*] the knowledge [*Erkenntnis*] that God's revelation discloses regarding the incarnation and the virgin conception. At all three levels divine activity must overcome human incapacity. Mary's profession of faith ("let it be with me according to your word" Lk. 1:38 NRSV) exemplifies to the reader the faithful response to these two miracles (172-3/187-9).

Barth is interested in the virgin conception primarily for what it excludes: firstly the sexual activity of men and women together, and secondly the activity of the male master of human history and culture. "Virgin birth means birth without previous sexual union between man and woman" (190; see 185-92), thus while, positively, it means Christ was born of a mother's body and blood like any other son, receiving something from his mother (185-6), its significance resides especially in what it lacks, for whatever Mary "does" as the conceiving virgin, she does not do it as a female partner in sexual reproduction. Mary's incapacity directs attention to the incapacity of the human nature itself for the incarnation and thus for God's revelation:

It is declared that in any other way, i.e., by the natural way in which a human wife becomes a mother, there can be no motherhood of the Lord and so no such entrance gate of revelation into our world. In other words, human nature possesses no capacity for becoming the human nature of Jesus Christ, the place of divine revelation. It cannot be the work-mate of God. If it actually becomes so, it is not because of any attributes which it possessed already and in itself, but because of what is done to it by the divine Word, and so not because of what it has to do or give, but because of what it has to suffer and receive-and at the hand of God. (187)

To secure the incapacity of Mary for this conception, Barth is careful to note that by the exclusion of the male, we should not imagine the Holy Spirit (the referent of the creedal clause, *conceptus de Spiritu sancto*) fulfills the function of the male (200-1). When he insists that the Holy Spirit is not an “apotheosised husband” and that there is no marriage between the two (200-1), it is, in part, because he does not want the virgin conception to be viewed as Mary’s body doing what female bodies are capable of doing. While she may be capable of becoming a mother, she is not capable of becoming so without a male partner, and the Holy Spirit is not that partner. Thus Barth writes, “Joseph is completely set aside, while God takes his place, not in the creative function of a creative father, but simply as God, as the Creator who performs a miracle, creating and instituting something new” (94). He goes so far as to suggest that, when it comes to the precise nature of the encounter of the Holy Spirit with the virgin Mary’s body, Mary’s ear is the proper bodily organ and opening for the Spirit’s activity in conception:

It is not, therefore, an illegitimate spiritualisation but a necessary interpretation of the miracle when Augustine says of Christ that He was conceived in faith or in grace and not in the sexual *libido* or *concupiscentia* of His mother (*Enchir.* 34; *Sermo* 152, 8). And in the same sense it is essentially right when John of Damascus (*Ekd.* 4, 14) describes Mary’s ear as the bodily organ of the miraculous conception of Christ. “The operation of the Holy Spirit at the conception of Jesus is one mediated through Mary’s faith. Mary believes ... and by believing in the Word of God spoken by the angel she is thereby enabled to take the eternal Word into herself and independently to bring about the beginning of the Redeemer’s life” (Ed. Böhl, *Dogmatik*, 1887, p. 311). (201)

He thus refuses any place for an analogy between sexual copulation and the Spirit’s relation to Mary: “By being called the work of the Holy Spirit the conception of Christ is actually withdrawn from any analogy save the analogy of faith and, like every genuine miracle, from any explanation of its How” (201).

In §15, as in *The Great Promise*, we see a female biblical figure functioning, like Adam, as a model for free human agency. Barth construes Mary’s own response to the angel’s promise as a response of faith, and it is in this response that she serves as a model to Barth’s readers, who are themselves confronted with the creed’s witness to the miracle of the virgin birth and the incarnation. In this construal of Eve there are further indicators of Barth’s anxiety over the way a fecund female body might lend support to a theology of human cooperation with divine activity. Barth rejects a Roman Catholic reading that sees in Mary’s piety (her faithful hearing of Gabriel’s promise) an indicator of her own pious worthiness, her receptivity to, capacity for, and active contribution to the divine work (143-4). He rejects the idea that behind her response to Gabriel is: a “receptive readiness” [*die empfangende Bereitschaft für Ihn*](144/158); a “living, passive and active receptivity to regenerating grace” (144/158); “the creature’s openness or readiness for its God” [*als Offenheit, als Bereitschaft des Geschöpfes für seinen Gott*](144/159); any notion that “in this believing acquiescence in the promise made to her she proves that she is disposed to possess the grace of the motherhood in question” (144/157-8). In her piety she is no more capable of contributing to this divine work than her body is capable of conceiving without a male partner. It would seem then that even the traditional idea of the passive receptivity of the female body is a risky site to put to service in a discussion of the virgin conception of Christ, for it risks an analogy between Mary’s relationship to God and her physiological relationship to Christ. It is why Barth is careful to emphasize the exclusion of human activity and eros of both sexes from this miracle.

Like Adam, who participates in creation with his own faithful recognition and naming of Eve, Barth notes that Mary’s response indicates that she is not merely a spectator of what God does with her body in bringing another being from it, but she participates in that creative act, precisely in her response of faith (187). Barth does not name Adam here, although the parallels are obvious. However, he aligns Mary with figures like John the Baptist, arguing that she serves to point us beyond herself to Christ:

As Luther understood it in his perfectly correct exegesis of the Magnificat, the greatness of the New Testament figure of Mary consists in the fact that all the interest is directed away from herself to the Lord. It is her “low estate” (ταπεινότης, Lk. 148), and the glory of God which encounters her, not her own person, which can properly be made the object of a special consideration, doctrine and veneration. Along with John the Baptist Mary is at once the personal climax of the Old Testament penetrating to the New Testament,

and the first man of the New Testament: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Lk. 1³⁸). She is simply man to whom the miracle of revelation happens. (140/153-4)

Barth goes on to suggest that Mary's response to the angelic announcement of the inconceivable notion that she will conceive ("let it be with me according to your word" Lk. 1:38 NRSV) is analogous to Christ's words in Gethsemane ("not my will but yours be done" Lk. 22:42 NRSV), for it is an acquiescence to a divine judgment accepted in trepidation (187). Barth thus gives us a biblical female figure acting in conformity to Christ's exemplary activity, much like Adam.

Barth makes some additional comments on sexual difference in his discussion of the virgin conception, some of which are quite different from his ordering of sexual relations in §41. Barth uses the virgin conception first to humble all human beings by excluding sexual intercourse from any role in the conception and birth of Christ, and then to humble men in particular. He writes: "The event of sex cannot be considered at all as the sign of the divine *agape* which seeks not its own and never fails. It is the work of willing, achieving, creative, sovereign man [der wollende, vollbringende, schöpferische, souveräne Mensch], and as such points elsewhere than to the majesty of the divine pity. Therefore the virginity of Mary, and not the wedlock of Joseph and Mary, is the sign of revelation and of the knowledge of the mystery of Christmas" (192/210).

While the virgin conception excludes the sexual activity of both sexes, the virgin conception further excludes the male would-be master of human history and culture from any contributing part in God's self-revelation in Christ:

So it is the male who must be set aside here, if a countersign is to be set up as the sign of the incarnation of God. In this sign the contradiction of grace is directed against the male because he is peculiarly significant for the world history of human genius. What takes place in the mystery of Christmas is not world history and not the work of human genius. (194)

Here Barth assumes the power and dominance of men in history, society and culture and notes the exclusion of this power and activity from God's work:

And now to complete our previous deliberations we can go on to say that willing, achieving, creative, sovereign man, man as an independent fellow-worker with God, man in the impulse of his eros, who as such, where God's grace is concerned, simply cannot be a participator in God's work, is *a parte potiori* man the male and the father of man in the sexual act which man has to thank for his earthly existence. We certainly have to say that the wife has also a share in this determination of man. For she, too, is man. Only a foolish ideology of manhood or an equally foolish ideology of womanhood can deny her her share in this determination of man. Nevertheless there can be no talk of an equality of the two sexes in this respect. God alone knows whether the history of humanity, nations and states, art, science, economics, has in fact been and is so predominantly the history of males, the story of all the deeds and works of males, as it appears to be, or whether, for all that, the hidden factor of female co-operation and participation has not, in fact, always turned the scale in a way of which chronicles, acts and monuments give us no information, because it involves an element which is deeply concealed both psychologically and sociologically, although it was not and did not need to be less potent for that reason. Be that as it may, if there had been a matriarchate instead of a patriarchate and if perhaps there actually still is a matriarchate, nevertheless it is-well, "significant," that the historical consciousness of all nations, states and civilisations begins with the patriarchate. Male action is significant for the world history and characteristic of the world history with which we are acquainted, as it has been and actually is for us, even if it is not so in itself. The biblical witness to revelation assumes this, and subsequent thought in the Christian Church has also taken it over without ado. (193)

In a noteworthy departure from his later position, Barth goes on to attribute the subordination of women in Bible, history and society to the curse following the Fall. With regard to Gen. 2, he notes specifically that Eve's status as "helpmeet" and her origination from Adam's side, do not imply the subordination of women. He evokes I Cor 11:8f (which refers to the creation of Eve from Adam), a passage that will later feature in Barth's efforts to subordinate women to men, and he asserts that one should not conclude from this passage that super/subordination is an "order of creation" but rather that it "a divine ordinance valid in the sphere of the Fall" (194): "not because of an original mark of distinction, but because of the common Fall of man and woman, in which both step out of a relationship in which there is no word at all of super- or sub-ordination, there arises the unlikeness, and man becomes the lord of woman and therefore significant for world history" (194). As we have seen in this chapter, by III/1, §41 Barth holds quite the opposite view.

his reading of these two creation narratives, with his earlier connection of the virgin conception to creation out of nothing, and with use of Vischer and Bonhoeffer who both have maternal imagery on their minds, it is striking that Barth does not mention the virgin conception at all in §41. Yet it is not surprising, for if the success of Barth's subordination of Eve to Adam requires his elision of the parallel origin of Adam from the earth, how much more so his silence regarding the parallel origin of Christ from Mary. Any reference might disrupt his efforts here to align Adam with Christ and Eve with the Church and thereby secure an irreversible order between the sexes. If we consider the lines above, in which Christ in the womb of Mary is analogous to Christ's presence within the Church, then Christ in the womb of Mary might evoke the image of Eve in the womb of Adam, and of Adam in the womb of the earth. Each in its origination from and gifting to another might thus serve as a sign of Christ.⁵⁶ To evoke the relationship of Mary

In spite of the differences between §41 and §15 with regard to the ordering of the sexes, Barth still wants to silence feminist criticism in both (a recurring concern in III/2 and III/4). He uses the exclusion of the male from the virgin birth towards this end:

If woman demands justification and rehabilitation in face of the significant pre-eminence of the male for world history-and it is better that she should not-let her keep to this sign. By its limitation of man and his sin it means at the same time the limitation of male pre-eminence. The sign declares that if Christ were the son of a male He would be a sinner like all the rest, and that therefore He cannot be the son of any male. (194).

The implication, then, is that women should take comfort in this sign and not actively seek to unsettle and resist male dominance in history and culture, presumably because it remains a divine ordinance, even if only subsequent to the Fall. By the time we reach III/1, Barth views male dominance in history and culture (and domestic relations) as the sinful distortion of an original order established with the creation of Adam and Eve, and thus it is the abuse of the order, and not the order itself, that is a consequence of the Fall. Barth's silencing of female protest against male domination in §15 gives reason to doubt whether Barth might have had a more progressive, egalitarian view of the relation between men and women had he not undertaken such a shift. For if the subordination of women is a divine ordinance in any capacity (pre- or post- Fall), then it is clear that Barth does not want to allow women to protest and resist it.

⁵⁶ A further clue to Barth's silence regarding Mary in these figuration sequences can be found in Charlotte von Kirschbaum's "Excursus: Mary in Current Mariological Debate", (*The Question of Women*, 139-48, esp. 140-2), published several years after III/1. In this essay she describes at length a position of modern Mariologists that echoes much of what Barth finds objectionable in Mariology. Von Kirschbaum problematizes the "joint causality" in which the two sexes participate in both the fall and redemption of humanity. As Eve was given to Adam as a helper, so too Mary is given to the new Adam. Eve aids Adam in the bringing about of death, and so God gives Mary to Christ as a co-cause of life. Mary thus becomes the co-cause of salvation through her activity as Mother of God, collaborating with Christ as a helper figure and mediating the relationship of the church to Christ. With this essay in view, it is very likely that Barth's silence regarding Mary in these prefiguration sequences reflects, in part, his aversion to this sort of alignment of Christ's saving activity with the activity of the singular figure of Mary. We

and Christ in his figural readings could only unsettle his efforts to secure the subordination of women to men through a figural reading of Genesis 2.

CONCLUSION

In his reading of Genesis 2, I have argued that Barth presents Adam as a model of the human mode of subjectivity that Barth himself performs in the opening of III/1, when he recognizes and professes Christ concealed in the creedal confession of creation. In Adam the biblical narrator holds up a mirror to the both dogmatician and to his (male) readers in which they might recognize themselves, and the mirror is also a sign that prefigures and points to the humbled and exalted Christ. With this model of human agency, Barth continues a dogmatic practice aimed at the unlearning of certain modern intellectual habits that he finds problematic. Thus Barth attempts to humble the reader who sees himself in Adam by foregrounding Adam's relativity and dependence. Along with the animals, Adam is made from the dust and animated by the divine breath; he is dependent on both earth and breath for his being, and he is not alone in this dependency. As such, Adam is a sign of God's life-sustaining goodwill toward the earth, for he is created as servant to and for the sake of the earth's needs. His labor as servant and sign is performed in the company of and in dependence on other creaturely servants and signs, who as "agents" in their own way labor toward the same ends that he does. He is a sign of God's goodwill to the earth, and they are in turn mirrors and signs to him of the same (and they do this

have good cause to suspect that this configuration of Christ and Mary alongside Adam and Eve, specifically as co-workers, plays a part in Barth's emphasis on the silent inactivity of Eve in this scene of recognition. I have drawn attention to the ways in which Barth carefully explores the prefigural relationship between Adam and Christ. If he is, in part, resisting a tradition in which Eve's activity prefigures Mary's co-redemptive activity then this might be a further clue as to why Barth should want to so carefully emphasize Eve's inactivity in her relation to Christ and her prefigural relation to the Church. Eve, like Mary, must represent the utter human incapacity and passivity before the active creative and redemptive work of God, whom Adam alone is allowed to prefigure.

precisely in their activity). Finally, his relativity and dependency are secured by the gifting of Eve, a partner without whom his creation as servant-sign to the earth is incomplete.

In situating sexual difference in a prefigurative and agential framework, Barth discreetly avoids other prominent contemporary options. He avoids the rhetoric of masculinity so prominent in wartime political and theological discourses. Adam is not the virile, lonely, manly, and courageous soldier-figure, but a farmer and gardener who is dependent on and situated within a network of creaturely agents whose collaboration he requires in order to fulfill his task. Adam does not enact his freedom when he defies the divine prohibition and eats from the tree of knowledge, but rather when he recognizes, accepts, and names Eve as the divine gift selected by God to be his partner, and as that without which he cannot be the human servant-sign to the earth.

Barth also avoids configuring sexual difference in terms of sexual reproduction. Barth's Adam and Eve acquire their theological and prefigurative significance as male and female in complete detachment from their reproductive functions. Patrilineal succession is tucked to one side of this account. Yet in order to detach sexual reproduction from the prefigurative function of Adam and Eve, Barth must find a way to account for the prominence of sexual reproduction in the Genesis creation narratives as well as the importance of patrilineal succession in the Old Testament. He does so by depicting sexual reproduction as a prophetic expression of messianic hope. Sexual reproduction's role in patrilineal succession belongs is a form of theological anticipation that will no longer be needed with the arrival of Christ, and so sexual reproduction makes no contribution to the theological significance of sexual difference as Barth depicts it in III/1. Whatever Eve might be or do for Adam in Barth's reading of Genesis 2, her designation in

the very next chapter as “the mother of all living” (Gen. 3.20) and any notion of her maternal function is as discreetly ignored as is the entire scene of her interaction with the serpent.

Sexual difference is situated strictly within an agential framework of co-actors, laborers, mirrors, and signs that all in various ways point beyond themselves to the gracious activity of God which will culminate in the work of Christ. Adam’s freedom to recognize and gladly accept the divine gift and law that Eve embodies (analogous to the two trees in the garden’s center) is performed in his naming of Eve as that one whom he has sought in vain. Having received a gift he could not find (nor recognize as such) on his own, he is obligated to continually seek and hasten toward an encounter with this neighbor. As he responds to and pursues Eve, Adam thus retains all those features of the continuously seeking subject who, for all his activity, remains continually dependent on divine initiative for his receipt of the partner he requires in order to become human. He thus models the role that our seeking, recognizing, and witnessing dogmatician performs for his reader in *Church Dogmatics* as he pursues (and hopes to enact) a fresh hearing and profession of the voice of the Word in human voices.

In Barth’s account of sexual difference, human agency becomes paradigmatically male. The seeking and vocal acceptance of a counterpart becomes a male prerogative that Adam performs on Eve’s behalf. The distinctively female mode of action that Barth locates in Eve is performed in silent consent to be the object of male pursuit, desire, and election. She is to do and say nothing at all, and as she “does” this, Adam sees both himself and his counterpart in her. The same Adam who saw signs of God’s provision for him and intent for his labor in the activity of mist, river, and earth, finds in his encounter with Eve an occasion that secures his own activity alone. If in this respect Eve reflects the previously sleeping Adam from whom she originates, she does not mirror his restless seeking, at least not as Barth reads this narrative, for he insists on

viewing this particular mode of activity as a male prerogative that secures male initiative and male superiority.

But Barth is not completely satisfied with this picture of silent immobility, for all the work it serves him in securing female subordination. Eve must be silent and still in order for Adam to acquire his privileged place. However, Adam and Barth require a fellow laborer not only to reflect but to buttress, support and aid them in their (dogmatic) pursuits and their Godward and earthward labor. Toward this end Barth evokes the seeking, desiring female voice of the Song of Songs so as to turn Eve's silent consent into the moment that precedes her responding address (but only ever a responding one). By this circuitous route, having first secured Adam's privileged place through Eve's decision to refrain from decision and speech, he finally sets Eve in motion, thereby gifting to Adam and himself a fellow worker to follow along after and support his Godward and earthward pursuits, a non-maternal female figure who is to "enact" that "still, quiet, soft and silent message" in which "the New Testament does not see a lack but the distinctive features of woman" (327). In Adam and Eve, then, Barth has reproduced a scene of his own dogmatic labor alongside his discursively faceless and voiceless collaborator, Charlotte von Kirschbaum.⁵⁷

In the current and preceding chapters, I have pointed to a number of moments in which assumptions about a distinctive female passivity trouble Barth's reading of Eve, his rejection of maternal imagery in interpreting Genesis 1-2, as well as his silence regarding the relation of Christ to Mary. There are moments in his figural reading where such references would have readily fit. The maternal body appears within this reading of Genesis 1-2 as a problematic site,

⁵⁷ See Ch. 2, fn. 15, 16, and 17 for a discussion of Selinger's work on von Kirschbaum's personal and professional relationship with Barth; ch 2, fn. 48 for a discussion of the ways in which Selinger finds Barth's and von Kirschbaum's accounts of the relation between men and women to be descriptive of their own relationship; ch 2 fn. 55 for Selinger's discussion of the contribution von Kirschbaum made to Barth's developing view of the imago Dei.

arising where it does only in the form of refusal and rejection. This body is not active enough in its generative capacities to afford imagery that can suitably depict God's creative activity, and yet it is too active to depict the role of the earth and dust that God uses to create animal, human, and plant life. While each of these non-human creaturely entities "act" in its own way, following and fulfilling the initiating creative activity and intent for them, Barth dissociates this activity from any association with the generative labor of female bodies. I recognize, along with many others, that Barth is here rejecting a valorization of maternity that was very powerful in his contemporary context, but at the same time I argue that Barth's aversion is deeply implicated in the capacity of the female body to reproduce offspring. He can secure no place for such activity in his theological imaginary in which the divine Father's begetting of a Son finds its reflection in God's creation of the cosmos, and also in the begetting of the sons by creaturely fathers. Generative third-parties can only interfere with his picture of divine creative capacity and creaturely incapacity.

In his earlier reading of Mary and Elizabeth in Luke 1, Barth is comfortable with talking about pregnant female bodies when their capacity to conceive in no way compromises the miracle of the divine act and the creature's incapacity for the work God does with it. When we compare Barth's reading of Luke 1 with his reading of the creation narratives, we see that the conceiving virgin and the conceiving post-menopausal woman occupy a parallel position to that of earth and Adam in Genesis 2—in each case, God creates something new out of material that is utterly incapable of the work God does with it. This earlier reading shows that the virgin conception might readily have found a place in Barth's figural reading alongside other scenes of origin that he evokes, given his construction of Mary's conception as an event in which God enables the female body to do something it is incapable of doing—conceive without a male

partner. Just as God selects a clump of earth from which to construct Adam, Adam's rib from which to construct Eve, and the nation of Israel from which to raise the Messiah, so also God selects one woman from among the many for the miraculous conception of Christ. Yet Barth's silence on this point is not surprising, for the origin of Christ from Mary would undermine his effort to use Eve's origin from a male body as an indicator of her subordinate status.

Assumptions about female passive activity also trouble Barth's configuration of women's agency. Barth attempts to construe Eve as the silent motionless object and mirror of Adam's seeking, recognizing, electing, and confessing Godward activity, but also as an agent who must respond to this male by seeking, following, and speaking after him. To acquire both, Barth arrives finally at a model of female agency that must continually re-enact a delayed recognition and response to a continual initiating male recognition and address. In this unlivable model Barth has not succeeded in securing a coherent account of a distinctively female agency.

Barth's earlier reading of Luke 1, however, indicates that Barth is capable of imaging fully functioning female agents when he is not bent on subordinating them to men. Like Adam, Mary and Elizabeth freely choose and declare what God has chosen for them, and in this way they serve as models of faith, ecclesial proclamation, and theological speech. Adam's free vocal acknowledgement of the gift of God in Eve, then, is not the performance of a distinctively male mode of subjectivity, even if Barth must gender it for a moment in order to secure female subordination. Compared to figures like Mary and Elizabeth, Adam occupies an agential site any and all humans might aspire to occupy. Adam is constituted as the recipient of divine gifts through the mediating activity of creaturely others. He returns the service, imitating the benefits he has received. And so his free activity plays out in a reciprocal exchange of services that has no fixed firsts or seconds.

I have continued to recall features of Barth's reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan in order to argue that he had an interpretive alternative consistent with many of his own theological commitments (if not his desire to retain sexual difference as an irreducible human divider). I have also argued that his reading of Genesis 2 as a whole lends itself readily to the alternative. My intent has been to show that Barth's own model of responsive human subjectivity (performed by Adam) has features that resist his construal of Eve. I have located this resistance in Adam's relationship to the earth and in his response to and recognition of God's gift in other creaturely actors. Next to so many (voiceless) creaturely actors the inactive Eve stands out as a departure. Barth need not have interpreted her role in the narrative as one of silent immobile consent, for mist, river, and earth all act alongside Adam and signify in their activity God's good will. He does not read their activity as a subordinated obedience to and a following after Adam's agrarian directions and pursuits, but rather he depicts them as collaborators with Adam in fulfilling and following after the creative work that God performs. Barth might have envisioned Eve as one among these collaborates. He might have imagined Eve hastening toward an encounter with Adam, on a search of her own that mirrors Adam's search, with a need that reflects his own—each reflecting to the other their dependence on divine grace and provision. In her narrative silence Barth might have met Adam's epistemic and volitional limits: his inability to fully access, direct, and control the desire, decision, and response of the other. In Adam's naming of Eve, Barth might have imagined an expression of Adam's unsettled redirection by and toward the imposition of Eve, rather than a mono-vocal declaration and dictation that sets the terms and constraints for Eve's own response and self-perception. That is, he might have imagined an Adam who responds to human alterity in a moment of critical self-reflection and re-evaluation, rather than an Adam who imposes on human alterity the terms in which it is to

understand itself, terms that must be silently consented to and not contested, questioned or rejected.

If, as I have suggested, Adam's recognition and proclamatory speech models not only human agency but also human theological activity, then the figure of Adam in confrontation with Eve presents us here with a troubling mode of theological engagement. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Barth presents the ideal of an agent who is put into question by the imposition of another human being. That agent is unsettled by the activity of the other, re-oriented out of its own self-oriented, self-involved (self-loving) pursuits. It is specifically the activity of the other that mediates this divine activity and redirection. In §18, then, the confrontation with human alterity invites a mode of theological self-critique and a reworking of dogmatic assumptions, categories, and the terms that frame the self's encounter with alterity. I have argued that Barth performed this critical questioning in his subversion of the antisemitic terms of an orders of creation framework for configuring the neighbor. But in Barth's Adam, we see a different model of encounter with human alterity. Here we have an agent who finds a reflection of himself in an immobile silent female other. He imposes on her the terms under which their relationship will proceed, as he chooses her, describes her, and speaks on her behalf to God, securing her as the objectified third party for his relationship to the divine subject. For her part, she is to consent to be the object of his dogmatic seeking, electing re-description on her behalf and in her stead.

In this respect, Barth's construal of Adam's response to Eve departs from his own dogmatic performance of a responsive hearing of biblical and creedal voices. In his dogmatic practice, as I have shown in previous chapters, Barth continually signals his hope that his dogmatic declarations are a response to the divine address concealed in the human voices that address him in the text of creed and Bible. He presents himself as obedient hearer of the Word in

these human voices. He aspires to enact a critical responsiveness to these others as their faithful witness holds up a mirror and sign that he hopes will put his own theological assumptions, frameworks, and categories into question. Adam's encounter with Eve, especially as Barth uses it to secure her inequality and subordination to Adam, does not model the critical interaction with human voices that Barth elsewhere attempts to perform.

Let us instead re-imagine Eve playing the role of Samaritan neighbor to a wounded needy Adam—a role in which she prefigures Christ the benefactor. Let us imagine her as the prefigurative sign of the divine gift-giving, a sign of the humbled and exalted Christ, and as such a mirror to the self. Let us imagine that Adam sees his own search for a neighbor reflected in her advancement to him, that he sees in her advancement the human material medium of a divine gift-giving activity. To do so we need to hold more closely together than Barth does the parallels between Adam's relation to the earth and Eve's relation to Adam. Eve in her humble origin and dependence on Adam reflects his humble origin and dependence on the earth. She is the gift that completes him and sign of God's goodwill to sustain life against the threat of death. He is the same gift to the earth. In this capacity, she reflects his exalted status as servant-sign to the earth of God's goodwill, and as such they both point beyond themselves to the gift of the humbled and exalted Christ. The earth receives its completion and servant-gardener in Adam, and it imitates the gift and returns the service by providing the plantlife and garden that nourish and shelter him. Likewise, in receiving his servant-partner in Eve, Adam is obligated to imitate the gift and return the service to her. Having recognized her as his neighbor, Adam (like the lawyer to whom Jesus told the parable), must hear the command to go and do likewise, to imitate his benefactor-neighbor and seek to play the neighbor to her. That is, he imitates the divine gift-giving that he sees reflected in the activity of Eve, rather than seeing God's creative activity in himself as he

plays God to Eve so as to complete his own creation. His response to Eve is the creaturely visible sign of this inner response to God: the love and pursuit of the neighbor is thus the outer sign of the inner love and pursuit of God, as was the case in §18.

In this reconfiguration Barth's sexually differentiated human dyad is unsettled, just as Barth used the Israelite-Samaritan relationship to unsettle and subvert fixed notions of ethnic difference. Adam functions as a model in whom any might see themselves, regardless of their sexual identity. In Eve they might recognize the companion-neighbor who meets their own need, regardless of that companion's sexual identity. As I argued in my first chapter, the neighbor (as sacramental sign and mirror to the self) plays the subversive function of unsettling ethnic and religious differences, allowing anyone to play the neighbor to the self, to be a sign of Christ, regardless of ethnic identity. The Jewish lawyer comes to Jesus as a figure in whom the reader might recognize him or herself (as someone preoccupied with the self-loving pursuit of self-justification); Jesus holds up to the lawyer and reader another figure in whom they might together recognize themselves, the fallen Israelite whose need is met by the anything-but-needy Samaritan. The lawyer and reader are to recognize in the Samaritan the neighbor that Jesus is to them, and they are to hear the command to imitate him and play the neighbor to another. Adam and Eve might thus serve as a similar mirror that destabilizes sexual difference.

In my final chapters, I turn to III/2 and III/4, Barth's prescriptive account of the normative relation between men and women. The current chapter has located in Barth's reading of Genesis 2 interpretive resources and a pattern of agency that unsettles and resists his later configuration of the relation between men and women. Having attended closely to the features of Barth's model agent in Genesis 2, I will, in the next chapter, find this same pattern of agency operative in Barth's §45.2 depiction of an "I" in pursuit of and encounter with its "Thou." There

again, in his efforts to subordinate women to men, Barth will gender the agent of §45.2, and once again this gendering has everything to do with the male's function as a sign of Christ.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHRIST AND THE DISAPPEARING “I” MUTUALITY AND ORDER IN BARTH’S THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

In this chapter I take up the tension I exposed in the previous chapter between the image of a seeking, desiring, speaking bride of the Song of Songs, who does all Barth’s model agent Adam does, and the silent, immobile Eve, whose restraint enables Adam to play his part as the first to act—to speak, elect and chose for and on behalf of her. I turn now to Barth’s description of sexual difference, located at the heart of his theological anthropology (III/2, §45.3).¹ In my final chapter I turn to his ethic for the sexually differentiated self (III/4, §54.1). The same tension will arise in both paragraphs, for Barth wants women to do all that he imagines agents must do if they are to conform themselves to Christ’s pattern of gracious activity, but at the same time Barth wants men to have a special stake in playing Christ to their female others. Barth’s reading of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 will provide the narrative template for much that is problematic in Barth’s account of sexual difference. In this chapter, I foreground the christological character of Barth’s human agent in III/2, §45.2: its initiating, aid-lending movement toward the other. In doing so my intent is to expose the incongruence in Barth’s claim that while women are such agents they must restrain their activity in relation to men. I will show that Barth’s ethically-oriented actualistic account of human agency has no place within it for this sort of constraint and so cannot support his effort to subordinate female activity to male activity. I will argue that if

¹ In this chapter, quotations and references to *Church Dogmatics* III/2 are cited in the body of the main text, without reference to volume and part-volume. When referring to other part-volumes, volume number and part-volume number will precede the page number. The first page number refers to the English translation of *Church Dogmatics*. When I refer to the German original, a second page number is positioned after a forward slash. For clarity within the notes, I occasionally use the annotation *KD* when referring to the German text, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, and *CD* when referring to the English translation, *Church Dogmatics*.

women are to appropriate this pattern of agency then they cannot curtail their activity without impeding the ethical initiative it directs toward the other.

Most critiques of Barth's account of the relationship between the sexes focus on the tension between reciprocity and order, especially as it manifests in III/2, §45.2 ("The Basic Form of Humanity") and §45.3 ("Humanity as Likeness and Hope"). In §45.2 Barth appropriates from Buber and Feuerbach an I/Thou phenomenological framework in order to construe human nature as the co-existence of an "I" with a "Thou." This relationship of self to other entails a mutual give-and-take based on a shared need and responsibility for the other, and Barth does not introduce sexual difference or super-subordering into his description. However, in §45.3 he identifies the interaction between the sexes, and marriage in particular, as the occasion for the fullest realization of this co-existence and fellowship, and it is here that he re-introduces the ordering that he used in III/1 to structure Adam's relationship to Eve.²

Spurred by this tension between mutuality and order, most analyses of the relationship between men and women (critical or defensive) are propelled by a concern with "order" itself, as it functions in Barth's theology. They follow the patterns of ordering found in the dyadic relationships that intersect with Barth's male-female construct: Father-Son, God-man, Creator-creature, Christ-Church, soul-body, heaven-earth. They seek the primary source for his sequential ordering and (for critics) the site for critical intervention and reconstruction. While these readings recognize the important role of the relationship between Christ and the Church of Ephesians 5 in lending biblical support to Barth's account of order, many identify the immanent

² Most embrace §45.2 as the central insight that Barth's anthropology lends to the relationship between man and woman, and they question the inevitability of the ordering imposed on it. However some critics argue that §45.2 already embeds the problems that become explicit in §45.3 (Fraser, "Karl Barth's Doctrine of Humanity"; Fraser, "Jesus' Humanity and Ours in the Theology of Karl Barth," 179-96; Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body*; Rogers, "Supplementing Barth on Jews and Gender: Identifying God by Anagogy and the Spirit," *Modern Theology* 14, no.1 (January 1998), 43-81). I address these arguments in a footnote below, in the context of my reading of §45.2.

trinitarian relation between Father and Son as the fundamental analogical source for all other relationships and thus as *the* primary site from which to understand and critique the ordering of the sexes in §45.3. While Barth says extremely little about the correspondence of the relationship between Father and Son and the relationship between man and woman, for these readers the immanent trinitarian relationship is the obvious site for critique and reconstruction, not only because it is the highest rung on the ontological ladder of Barth's "analogy of relations," but also because the partners occupy the same ontological plane, whereas the Christ-church relation (complicated by the incarnation) embeds the ontological distinction and the inescapable sequential order of Creator and creature. Since formulations of trinitarian doctrine have traditionally refused hierarchy and subordination in the relationship of Son to Father, this dyad promises to provide the resource for undermining hierarchy among human beings, *if* Barth can be held to these traditional formulations. The question then becomes whether or not this one trinitarian relationship unsettles or supports the ordering of the sexes, and if it supports it, how it might be reconfigured to do otherwise.³

³ This focus on the immanent Trinity is in-part prompted by the several places where Barth speaks of an analogy between the Father and Son and the I/Thou orientation of inter-human fellowship. In his III/1, §41 reading of Gen. 1, Barth draws an analogy between the fellowship of one sex with the other, the imago Dei (Christ) in his fellowship with the creature, and the inter-trinitarian fellowship (III/1, 185). Barth concludes his discussion of the relations between the sexes in III/2, §45.3 by referencing this earlier discussion and repeating this same connection. Here again the analogy is clearly directed through the model of activity that Christ exemplifies. The human relational orientation is a likeness of the relationship-constituting activity of Christ the imago Dei: "As man generally is modelled on the man Jesus and His being for others, and as the man Jesus is modelled on God, it has to be said of man generally that he is created in the image of God" (III/2, 324). Barth goes on to say that God, as Father of the Son and Son of the Father, is both I and Thou, confronting himself yet always one and the same in the Holy Spirit. He speaks here of an "analogy of relations." This analogical category is named also in III/2, 218-9, where he points to an analogy in the pattern of activity exhibited by Christ as the incarnate savior and as the electing and elected Son of the Father. By showing how Barth carefully patterns human agency after Christ's agency, my chapter will expose the very limited sense in which such references to immanent trinitarian relations actually contribute materially to the development of Barth's anthropology. They do not function as the direct foundation on which Barth patterns his theological anthropology, but rather they secure the divine and revelatory credentials of Christ's saving activity.

One passage in particular gives the impression that Barth's doctrine of the Trinity has a central part in shaping Barth's ordering of the relationship between man and women, even though the text comes many part-volumes later. IV/1, §59, 202 is the one text where Barth explicitly connects his *ordering* of the sexes to the ordering of the relationship between Father and Son *ad intra*. Here Barth presents Christ's obedience to God as an

This approach has limitations that lead to a misdiagnosis of Barth's gender trouble. First it allows "order" as such to overshadow the account of human agency that Barth develops in §44 and §45, particularly its careful conformity to the pattern of activity that Christ exhibits.

Interpreters follow a recurring sequential pattern of ordering through a map of dyads (a pattern of which Barth himself has very little to say, aside from brief and passing comments), instead of following the activity of the agent that constitutes the respective relationships (along with their ordering)—a pattern of which Barth has much more to say. I will argue that the problem is not Barth's ordering as such; rather it is the eventual gendering of Barth's singular model of human

intra-triune event associated with the Son, and he claims in passing that if the subordination of Son to Father is no indicator of an inequality between the two then neither is it with respect to the subordination of wives to husbands. With this statement Barth has feminists in his sights, and specifically their criticism that there is a contradiction between equality and order in efforts like Barth's own to hold together the full human dignity of woman alongside their subordinate status in relation to men.

Paul Jones (*Humanity of Christ*, 203-216, esp. 212-3) critiques Barth's move here as a distortion of what Barth is attempting in §59—namely a creative re-configuration of *Gehorsam* as a central category for thinking about God's obedient self-determination qua Son and the concurrent obedience rendered by the man Jesus. As Jones explains, §59 presents the Son's obedience as an event of divine self-determination, wherein the Son incarnate actualizes the electing will of the Father, as a responsiveness in finite space and time to the directive address of the Father. This self-determination of God (as the Son assuming human flesh) provides for Barth an economic insight into God's immanent life. Here Barth shows obedience to be a disposition predicable to the Son as such; otherwise the Son would be different from the God revealed in Christ. The humiliation and lowliness of the Son are dominant themes in Barth's conception of God, insofar as obedience names the Son's willingness to realize God's love in a very radical way, to the extent of an eternal ontological transformation wherein the Son assumes a human nature (Jones, 187-244, esp. 203-208). Jones draws attention to the distorting and doctrinally corruptive influence of Barth's sexism, exhibited at the end of this discussion in this particular passing comment on wives and husbands. It imports into the rich account that precedes it a distorting crude hierarchy and rank, one that implies a chain of command. Jones notes also the flawed analogy at play here, wherein Barth transmutes a paternal relation to a marital relation, and renders fatherhood-sonship analogous to sexual difference hierarchically construed as a heterosexual marriage, all for the sake of upholding social and cultural mores. He finds this distracts from Barth's careful efforts to depict the Son's obedience as the fulfillment and execution of divine decision (212-3).

From the vantage point of III/2, §§44-45.2, I would add to this criticism the observation that the obedient activity of the Son qua Christ, in his outward incarnational descent to humankind (found in §59), is the same activity and movement that Barth describes in §44.1 where he depicts Christ as the "penetrating spearhead" of the electing will of the Father (III/2, 143, 145). In §45.2 this movement toward the other is what the human "I" must (obediently) pattern its own activity after; and in §45.3 this obedient conformity to the Son's obedient electing movement becomes a paradigmatically masculine prerogative. However, in §59, now that Barth is presenting this movement in terms of obedience to another rather than as the penetrating spearhead of the executive will of God, he would have Christ's activity appropriated by women instead. This shifty move does not stand up to interrogation under Barth's own terms, either in §59 or in §44 and §45. In this chapter and the next, I will show that Barth's ordering of the relationship between the sexes persistently relies on precisely such superficial underdeveloped claims, and nowhere is this more obviously the case than in the vague and minimal effort he puts into describing the order between the sexes in §45.3. As we shall see, he repeatedly declines to offer descriptive explanations on what he means by order, lest he say too much. That he declines to do so is not surprising, for the claims prove consistently unsustainable when interrogated in light of the detailed discussions of agency to which they refer. The force of such statements resides precisely in their superficiality.

agency. As with Adam, Barth's model human agent becomes paradigmatically male in §45.3, and it is this move that produces the tension between the mutuality of "I" and "Thou" in §45.2 and the order of man and woman in §45.3. The critical question is not whether a hierarchical order persists in the many relationships comprising his *Dogmatics*, but whether he will allow women to fully appropriate the pattern of agency that Barth both describes and attempts to model for his readers.⁴

⁴ Watson's *A Study of Karl Barth's Doctrine of Man and Woman* exemplifies the sort of misreading that results from a focus on order as such. With her sights set on the "analogy of relations" itself, she starts in III/1 with the Barth's linking of sexual difference to the imago Dei (Gen. 1). She skips forward to Barth's ordering of Adam's relation to Eve (Gen. 2), and moves from there to III/2, where she jumps over §§43-45.2, (a section fundamental to grasping the christological and agential dimensions of male privilege) and goes directly to the ordering of the relationship between man and woman in §45.3. There she focuses on Barth's use of the Christ-Church relation (Eph 5) to order the relation between the sexes. She moves finally to §54, where again her attention is on the ordering of the sexes, and here she does not attend to Barth's discussion of the mutual interaction between male and female which parallels his §45.2 discussion. In her focus on a recurring pattern of sequential ordering she displaces Barth's careful patterning of human activity after Christ's activity, for and on behalf of human beings. She finds that all analogies to relationship between man and woman (Father and Son, Christ and Church) fail because of the nature of the dissimilarities in play. As a result she objects to the use of analogy itself in Barth's theological anthropology. Stephenson ("The male and female interpersonal relation in Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*," 435-449) follows a similar interpretive trajectory. Moving from the discussion of Gen. 2 in III/1, to III/2, §45.2-3, to III/4, §54, she argues that Barth preserves a "static relational order" of the sexes that arises because he superimposes the trinitarian order of Father-Son onto the creation order of Adam-Eve in III/1. She wants to preserve the mutuality of §45.2, but she does not recognizing the central place of Christ's activity in shaping the agency of the "I," and so she views Christ's activity on behalf of others as further support for the problematic order. Frykberg (*An Analogical Critique Regarding Gender Relations*), following the same interpretive approach, concludes that Barth requires a human analogue to both the Father-Son relationship (which she finds to be mutual and reciprocal) and the Christ-Church relation (which she finds to be hierarchically ordered). Her corrective is first to secure the man-woman-child relation as an analogue of the Father-Son-Spirit relation (thereby correcting the problem of a dyadic human image for a triune God); second she secures the parent-child relation as an analogue of the Christ-Church relationship. Thus she overlooks the indispensability of Christ's agency for Barth's conception of human fellowship. Campbell ("An Appraisal of Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Imago Dei in Light of His Doctrine of the Trinity") uses Barth's III/1 connection of imago Dei with Father-Son as her interpretive stepping stone into a grid of analogical relationships. She recognizes that Christ is the fulcrum on which all analogies turn, but she follows the analogical ladder up to its highest rung, the immanent trinitarian relationship, where she finds that Barth has imported the creator-creature super/subordering into the Father-Son relationship by way of his reconfiguration of the doctrine of election, and its effectual collapse of the distinction between economic and immanent Trinity. She finds super-subordering pervades Barth's entire dogmatic edifice and is embedded in the very epistemology that makes it possible. Many critics and defenders alike, have followed this interpretive trajectory, with its focus on order as such (and thus on a map of analogous dyads), and with its tendency to allow the Father-Son relation to over-determine their readings of male-female ordering and to overshadow the pattern of Christ's activity. For others who follow a similar interpretive trajectory with an eye to order, see also: Alexander J. McKelway, "The Concept of Subordination in Barth's Special Ethics," *SJT* (1979): 345-57; McKelway, "Perichoretic Possibilities in Barth's Doctrine of Male and Female," 231-43; Fiddes, "The Status of Woman in the Thought of Karl Barth," 138-55; Deddo, *Karl Barth's Theology of Relations*.

Second, readings that locate the source of Barth's ordering (and the site for critical intervention) in the immanent trinitarian relationship do not take into account the impact that Barth's reformulation of the doctrine of election in II/2 has upon the methodological function of the immanent Trinity in the rest of *Dogmatics*, nor of the ways in which it complicates the assumption of an ontological homogeneity of the immanent Trinity.⁵ Many of these readings preceded the still-ongoing debate around Barth's doctrine of election, which has drawn attention to these issues. This debate has led to the widespread recognition among Barth scholars that after

⁵ In *CD* II/2, §§32-35 Barth undertakes an innovative reformulation of a classical Reformed doctrine of double predestination, specifically the idea that God's decrees to elect some and reject others precedes God's decree to effect election through the provision of a mediator. Barth presents Jesus Christ as the one elected and rejected human being, through whom all other human beings are elected (see Bruce McCormack, "Grace and Being: The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology," in *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008], 188-9). Barth incorporates his doctrine of election into his doctrine of God, by presenting it as revelatory of God's very nature (as the one who loves in freedom): election is the eternal decision and revelatory movement wherein God moves out beyond God's triune fellowship to create and sustain fellowship with the creature, and so his doctrine of election becomes the lynchpin for his christocentric construal of the revelatory center to dogmatic reflection. Barth reconfigures the reformed doctrine of election by construing the incarnate second person of the Trinity as both the subject and object of God's eternal decision to establish a relationship of fellowship and love with human beings. "Jesus Christ" is the *elected God*, the Son of the Father, who in taking a human nature to himself is the object of the Father's eternal will to create and sustain fellowship with the human creature. Jesus Christ is at the same time the *electing God*, who as Son of the Father, wills and actualizes the Father's intent as his own, in a seamless movement toward the creature wherein he assumes a human nature (II/2, 100-50). As such, Jesus Christ is the *elect human*, who obediently fulfills the will of God that he should suffer and die on behalf of his disobedient fellow human beings, and so be both the object of God's rejection of human sin and the object of God's election of human beings to fellowship with God. As such, Christ brings all other humans into fellowship with God as sharers in his own election (II/2, 115-27). By configuring the incarnate Christ as both the object and subject of divine election, Barth is concerned to keep the incarnation as the site of revelatory divine self-disclosure: for unless Christ is himself the electing God (as well as the elected God) we do not encounter in Christ the eternal decision of a God who has freely elected to create and sustain fellowship with the human; we must instead look beyond Christ to a hidden and unknowable Father (II/2, §33, 100-115). Barth indicates his concern to rid his theology of any fear of an unknown will or decree of God, or the fear of a God other to or different from the God disclosed in Christ—a hidden God who determines some human beings to election and fellowship and others to rejection (145-53). From eternity, Barth argues, God has freely willed to constrain God's activity by directing it toward the aim and realization of creating and sustaining fellowship with the creature, and there is no hidden or arbitrary counter-decision other than what God has revealed in the incarnation.

With this reformulation, Barth secures Christ, the incarnate Son, as the center not only of Barth's doctrine of God, but also of Barth's theological anthropology. Both the divine nature and the human nature are revealed in Christ. If the dogmatician must not look past Jesus Christ to another site or center, to a hidden Father, from which to develop his doctrine of God, neither must he look behind Jesus Christ to a hidden Father to develop a secure theological grounding for anthropology. Thus Barth's theological anthropology takes its shape from a christology underwritten by his reformulation of the doctrine of election. From the vantage point of his doctrine of election (which he gestures to in §44.1), it is not surprising that he does not develop the inter-human fellowship of §45.2 on a detailed depiction of inter-triune fellowship but rather on the activity of the incarnate Son, nor is it surprising that he gives only backward glances to that inter-triune fellowship that the Son incarnate reveals (see fn. 3 in regard to these texts).

II/2, Barth accesses the immanent Trinity always through a christology that has at its center the eternally electing and elected Son-become-flesh, Jesus Christ. For many interpreters, references to the immanent Trinity in the remainder of *Church Dogmatics* serve a very limited function, if any at all. These scholars argue that after II/2, the ontological identity of the Son is always already complicated by the eternal decree that unites the Son to the human Christ. As a consequence it becomes very difficult to talk about the Father-Son relationship in and of itself, apart from any consideration of God's eternal decision to establish a relationship with the creature. For the purposes of my project, this debate has exposed the deep doctrinal and methodological significance of Barth's decision to build his theological anthropology on christology (and not on his doctrine of the Trinity), and it traces this decision back to his doctrine of election. Barth's doctrine of the immanent Trinity might lend support to, but cannot supplant or overshadow, the work that the electing and elected Christ plays in shaping Barth's theological anthropology.⁶

⁶ This debate among Barth scholars focuses on the dogmatic and methodological implications of Barth's reformulation of the doctrine of the election in *CD* II/2 [§§32-35], which I described in the previous footnote. For a description of the terms of the debate and some representative essays and voices in the debates, see Michael T. Dempsey, ed., *Trinity and Election in Contemporary Theology*. Since Barth laid out his doctrine of the Trinity in *CD* I, prior to his reformulation of election in *CD* II/2, scholars disagree over whether dogmatic reflection on the immanent Trinity still holds the same place in his theology that it did in *CD* I, and some question whether his doctrine of election leaves any place for it at all. Beginning with Bruce McCormack, "revisionists" as they have come to be named and to name themselves, argue that Barth's doctrine of election in *CD* II/2 signals a crystallization of his christocentrism, and it results in a profound revisioning of the way he articulates and refers to the Trinity *ad intra*. After *CD* II/2 Barth loses interest in the significance of the immanent life of the Trinity, the *Logos asarkos*, and ultimately any talk of God in Godself apart from reference to God's self-revealing activity in relationship to creation. McCormack argues that Barth's doctrine of election effects a revolution in his doctrine of God: the subject of election is not the *Logos asarkos* (an indeterminate divine person, un-determined by the electing decision), but Jesus Christ (the *Logos incarnandus* who is determined by the eternal divine decision for incarnation in time) (see Bruce McCormack, "Grace and Being: The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology," in *Orthodox and Modern*, 186]. Barth's doctrine of election is underwritten by his rejection of any place for an indeterminate state of being in the life of the Logos prior to the divine determination to enter time and become human.

For McCormack and others, this opens up a reading of Barth wherein the electing decision and activity of God is constitutive of divine essence (not merely expressive of it in a way that might suggest divine essence precedes act, although this is one possible reading) ("Grace and Being" 188). On account of God's intent to elect, create and sustain fellowship with the creaturely other, God constitutes Godself from eternity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. McCormack, thus states, "Perhaps the most significant consequence of this move is that the immanent

Trinity is made to be wholly identical in content with the economic Trinity” (191). While McCormack recognizes that Barth continues to make statements after II/2 that create space for an independent doctrine of the Trinity, he suspects that such inconsistencies are due to a failure on Barth’s part to fully realize the profound implications of his doctrine of election for the doctrine of the Trinity, or that perhaps he shied away for unexpressed reasons from doing so (193). See also McCormack, “The Ontological Presuppositions of Barth’s Doctrine of the Atonement,” 346-66; McCormack, “Seek God Where He May Be Found,” 62-79; Nimmo, *Being in Action*, 4-12; Nimmo, “Barth and the Election-Trinity Debate: A Pneumatological View, in *Trinity and Election*, ed. Michael T. Dempsey, 162-81.

Other scholars recognize the profound implications of Barth’s doctrine of the election for the function of the immanent Trinity in theological reflection after II/2, but they do not go as far as suggesting that Barth identifies the immanent with economic Trinity. They view Barth’s continued references to the immanent Trinity and *Logos asarkos* post-II/2 not as inconsistencies on Barth’s part but rather as serving a very significant albeit very limited role in securing the freedom and independence of God over creation; they are not detached or separable from the revelation of God in the elected Christ (see Kevin Hector, “God’s Triunity and Self-Determination: A Conversation with Karl Barth, Bruce McCormack and Paul Molnar,” *IJST* 7 no.3 [2005]: 246-61; Paul Jones, *Humanity of Christ*, 60-116, 187-244; Jones, “Obedience, Trinity, and Election: Thinking with and beyond the *Church Dogmatics*” in *Trinity and Election*, 138-161). Jones finds that the eternal decision to elect is in a qualified sense “transformative” for God: “given a ‘primal decision’ that predicates ontological and agential complexity to God qua Son, God pre-temporally anticipates God’s relationship with the human creature. In that the divine Son is never not becoming the person of Jesus Christ, God is always intending a history between God and humankind, anchored in the life of Christ” (*Humanity of Christ*, 190). It is in this sense that God makes the identity of Jesus Christ (“the totality of the intentions, actions and events associable with, and constitutive of, this person”) “constitutive of God’s second way of being” (ibid., 191-2).

Critics of the above readings, (“traditionalists” as they have come to call themselves), object to the suggestion that Barth collapses the immanent into the economic Trinity, and they are troubled by the suggestion of an ontologically transformative infringement on God qua Son by way of election. They find these other readings jeopardize the freedom of God’s being from creaturely reality. For essays representative of this position see: Paul Molnar, “The Trinity, Election, and God’s Ontological Freedom: A Response to Kevin W. Hector,” *IJST* 8 no.3 (2006), 294-306; Molnar, “Can the Electing God be God Without Us? Some Implications of Bruce McCormack’s Understanding of Barth’s Doctrine of Election for the Doctrine of the Trinity,” in *Trinity and Election*; George Hunsinger, “Election and the Trinity: Twenty-Five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth,” in *Trinity and Election*; Hunsinger, *Reading Barth with Charity*. They argue that Barth continues to retain an indispensable place in his theology for talk of the immanent Trinity and *Logos asarkos*, and that, certain ambiguous statements aside, Barth never configures the divine electing decision as constitutive of trinitarian identity. Yet even these readers recognize the limited sense in which talk of the immanent Trinity functions in Barth’s theology after II/2. Thus George Hunsinger speaks of a logic of “antecedence” that underlies all Barth’s statements about the economic Trinity. His doctrine of election presupposes the immanent trinitarian life, and his statements about this life are presented precisely as that which the revelatory work of Christ requires the dogmatist to posit antecedently (ibid., 82-3).

For the purposes of my argument in this chapter, all sides of this debate draw attention to the limited place and function that the immanent Trinity has in Barth’s theology after II/2. The debate itself lends support to my claim that Barth’s few references to the Father-Son *ad intra* in III/2 should not provide the interpretive framework for analyzing Barth’s construal of the relationship between the sexes. If “revisionists” (including the more moderate readers) are correct, then the human nature of Christ (and with it the trinitarian grounding for theological anthropology) is already secured from eternity in the will and embrace of the Father, Son and Spirit. Human nature is so closely and intimately bound to the Son qua Christ, that there is no place left for extensive dogmatic reflection on God, independent of God’s eternal self-revealing decision to elect this one human being. If “traditionalists” are right, then the doctrine of the immanent Trinity is to be articulated from the vantage point of election: the eternally electing Father and electing and elected Son presuppose an immanent inter-trinitarian relationship of fellowship. This position also explains why Barth builds his anthropology on christology and not on the immanent Trinity, and why he makes only backward references to the inner-trinitarian fellowship, but does not devote any materially significant space to discussing it. While much of the literature on the relationship between man and woman has tended to compensate for Barth’s reticence on the Trinity with backward retrievals from *CD I* (see fn. 4 above), this debates has exposed the methodological and doctrinal significance of Barth’s reticence in III/2 in elaborating on the analogy of the immanent Father-Son relation and inter-human fellowship.

In this chapter I turn to the tension between reciprocity and order, but I reframe the problem. Rather than following a pattern of order, I follow Barth's christological agent through the theological anthropology of III/2, §§43-45, and I track his pattern of relationship-constituting activity—as Son of the Father, as the eternally elected savior of human kind, as the man Jesus among his fellows. I describe the ways in which Barth patterns human agency after Christ's activity. At the same time, I expose the performative dimensions of Barth's account, as he positions himself, and his readers with him, as objects of this activity, who must, in turn become subjects by conforming themselves to this activity in a turn toward the needy human "other." Christ the Good Samaritan reappears here calling the beneficiaries of his grace to "Go and do likewise." Gospel precedes law as grace embeds an ethical obligation. I will show how deeply this ethical obligation is engrained in Barth's human agent, the "I" of §45.2.⁷ In §45.3 this "I" is appropriated by the male as Barth secures for the male the prerogative of playing Christ to his female other. As a result the would-be female agent is burdened by restraints. The tension between the reciprocity of §45.2 and the order of §45.3 thus arises from Barth's efforts to constrain in women the most important feature of the would-be-imitator of Christ, his ethical impulse, an initiating move toward and on behalf of others.

As I follow Barth's christological and anthropological agents through III/2, I will continue to expose the tenuous grounds on which Barth establishes sexual difference as the primary site of human fellowship. Barth has only one model and pattern of agency, the one that Christ exemplifies and human beings are to imitate. When Barth introduces an ordered

⁷ Jason A. Springs ("Gender, Equality, and Freedom in Karl Barth's Theological Anthropology," 447-77) offers an insightful reading of the ethical dimensions of §45.2, with a particular eye toward correcting Barth's problematic ordering of the relationship between man and woman. Like my own reading, he is attentive to Barth's construal of human agency (specifically human freedom) and not to patterns of ordering. Thus, while he looks back to the immanent trinitarian relations in *CD* I he does so with an eye to deepening Barth's theological construal of human freedom in §45.2. The humanity of Jesus as the primary text for Barth's theological anthropology remains central to his analysis of human ethical activity (458-9).

relationship between the sexes as the site for its fullest performance, human fellowship, and with it his theological anthropology and ethics, take a heteronormative turn. I will argue that the privileged place Barth gives to sexual difference and the relationship between the sexes in §45.3 has a tenuous connection to its christological mooring in §45.1, not only because Christ is not married to a member of the opposite sex, but also because sexual difference does not structure Barth's depiction of Christ's relationship to other human beings in §45.1.⁸

⁸ Here I share the interest of several recent works in unsettling the heteronormativity of Barth's theological anthropology and ethics on his own terms. Eugene Rogers (*Sexuality and the Christian Body*) conducts a book-length investigation into Barth's heteronormative construal of co-humanity, which he finds to be the strongest theological version of the complementarity thesis there is. His stated intent is to preserve the Pauline symbology that finds in the love of Christ for the church a model of marriage, while rescuing Barth's depiction of co-humanity from compulsory complementarity. While male-female complementarity may be typical of co-humanity, it need not be essential (141-2). He questions Barth's selection of biblical narratives for exemplars of co-humanity (Gen. 2 above all); he finds resources in other narratives that show co-humanity between the same sex; and he argues that more must be made of Christ's celibate state than Barth is willing to make. He too finds that with compulsory complementarity of §45.3, Barth's account of human fellowship loses its christological (and narrational) moorings to a binary relationship. He traces the problem back to §45.2, a reading I contest in a footnote below. He is especially critical of Barth's preference for dyadic relational structures, which he finds distort Barth's reading of narratives by effacing the role that third parties play. He focuses specifically on Gentile-Jew, male-female binaries, for he finds that in Barth's treatment of these similar binary patterns Barth hides real Jews and women behind projections (143). By engaging these patterns Rogers aims to deconstruct Barth's argument about homosexuality. In my previous chapter I argued that Gen. 2 has resources that may be used toward the same end that Rogers intends, but Rogers does not recognize these since he focuses on Barth's reading of the final scene between Adam and Eve. In this chapter I will locate these same resources in the pattern of agency Barth develops in §45.1 and §45.2.

In this chapter and the next, my post-structural critique of Barth's reification of sexual difference, indebted to the gender theory of Judith Butler and Luce Irigaray, resonates with the analysis of two other articles on sexual difference in Barth. Jamie Balboa ("A Constructivist-Gay Liberationist Reading of Barth," 771-789) deals specifically with Barth's ethics of sexual difference in §54 which I take up in my final chapter. Graham Ward ("The Erotics of Redemption," 52-72) shares my suspicion that Barth has, in spite of himself, reified naturalistic observations and premises in his account of sexual difference. Ward argues that sexual difference remains a highly unstable site for Barth but acquires theological significance within a chain of analogical relations. He argues that Barth does not succeed in providing an account of sexual difference but instead produces an economy of the same in which woman serves the narcissistic project of reflecting man's image, and Barth's reading of the Adam-Eve scene of recognition enacts this economy. Ward finds resources for a critical corrective to Barth's account of sexual difference in an alternate economy of desire that he finds at play in Barth's doctrine of the Trinity. In the trinitarian life, encounter with alterity is expressed in a kenotic outpouring of self-giving love that exposes the problematic character of the economy of desire enacted by Adam: an economy based on lack, demand, and possession. Ward wants a single erotic economy that is not plagued by notions of complementarity and hierarchy, and one that is open to same-sex erotic partnerships. I share these aims with Ward and agree with his criticism of the scene of recognition between Adam and Eve (and its parallel exposition in §45.3). However, I find that the erotic economy that Ward appreciates does not drive the trinitarian relations alone but fuels his "analogy of relations" as he puts it to work in his theological anthropology. In my previous chapter I showed that Adam was part of this erotic economy until it seized up with the arrival of Eve. That economy will be interrupted again in III/2 with the introduction of sexual

CHRIST THE MIRROR (§43)

Barth opens his theological anthropology in *Church Dogmatics* §43 (“Man as a Problem of Dogmatics”) by fixing his sight on the human subject, first excusing himself from the task of a cosmology by securing the anthropological vantage point from which any discussion of the cosmos must speak. He will not write a cosmology of the heavens and the earth (the sum total of all that is not God yet created by God), for he accepts that God’s relation to the cosmos as such is shrouded in mystery and remains an inaccessible and inappropriate topic of dogmatic reflection. Rather he will consider how these heavens and earth delimit and fix the vantage point he necessarily occupies as would-be hearer and proclaimer of the Creator’s address. Barth thus begins his theological anthropology by locating his object (the human being) where he hears the first article of the Apostle’s Creed situate him: under heaven and on earth (3-7)—the same site and confessional vantage point from which Barth opened his doctrine of Creation in III/1. Here again he speaks of the heavens and earth in its duality as “one great parable” of God’s activity for and on behalf of human beings (11): the human is situated by God on earth, the sphere in which human activity plays and an area accessible to human knowledge. The heavens form the horizon of the earth and thus of the reach of human self-determination, for it is the sphere from which God speaks, directing and delimiting the human’s appropriate response (11-16).⁹

difference and its order. Ward does not attend to the whole of Gen. 2, and so misses the way Adam models a type of agency patterned after Christ (and prefiguring Christ). See ch.3 fn.5.

⁹ Barth writes: “The man with whom we are concerned in dogmatics is man in the cosmos. He is man under heaven, i.e., as delimited by a realm of being which like himself was created by God and is therefore real, but which is basically hidden from and inaccessible to man, which absolutely transcends him and is therefore a realm of being higher than man, corresponding though not equal to the transcendence of God. And he is man on earth, i.e., in a realm of being which like himself was created by God and is therefore real and distinct, which is basically open and knowable and under his control, in which the animal and spiritual mingle, which is a lower sphere, corresponding but not equal to the lowliness of man before God and God’s condescension to him. Whatever else man is, he is rooted in this twofold determination. And the converse is also true that, whatever else the cosmos is, it is so as heaven and earth, as the beyond and the present, as that which limits and that which is limited for man....under heaven and on earth; within the lower, this-worldly sphere appropriate to him, and confronted by the higher,

Barth turns next to the central epistemological issue at hand by setting the limits within which his theological anthropology will unfold (§43.2). A theological anthropology will differ from other anthropologies insofar as the dogmatician refuses *to teach himself*, whether through self-reflection, or with the use of speculative theory, dominant world views, or the biological, psychological and sociological sciences, or a combination of any of these. If he is not to use these resources to teach himself about the nature of the Creator, neither is he to use them to teach himself about the nature of the human creature. At best they can only be a supplemental aid to what he must first learn from the church's witness to Christ (19-26). Our dogmatician thus fixes his gaze on the divine and human actor, Jesus Christ, *ready to be taught* once again about this one agent as he journeys through the ecclesial witnesses of scripture, creed and proclamation.

Barth depicts Christ as a mirror that acts on the self as it reflects. In this mirror the dogmatician must recognize not only what he can never be (the Word of God made flesh) but also the human being he ought to be but is not due to sin (27). The dogmatician will see himself in this mirror (a seeing that can only be the result of the mirror's enabling revelatory activity) when he recognizes in Jesus Christ first the expression and performance of the attitude and will of God towards the human being, and then also that very human being that God willed and designed to be the object of God's covenant relationship. Thus the incarnate Word embodies and performs both the activity and will of God toward the human creature and the responding activity of the human creature toward God. In this way Christ is the central point of reference not only for an understanding of who and what God is and does in relation to the human creature, but also for what that creature is and ought to aspire to be as the recipient of and responder to that activity. Jesus Christ is therefore the proper focus for knowledge of the self, for constructing a

transcendent sphere which forms its limit. What we say is that he is under heaven and on earth; that he is in the cosmos" (III/2, 14-15).

theological anthropology, and for building an ethic wherein the agent will seek to conform himself [and to a lesser extent herself] to the sort of activity he sees modeled in Christ (40-41).

This mirror does not, however, provide fully transparent access to self-knowledge, for it has its own built-in constraints for theological anthropology. Not only must the mirror itself enable the dogmatician's penitent recognition of himself in it, but the human Christ, while utterly like us in his humanity, is nevertheless utterly unlike us in his divinity: he has a different relation to God than we do (being God's very self), and he is sinless in a way we can never be. Looking at him, we can at best learn something about ourselves indirectly (31-53).

With such limits in view, Barth outlines the way a theological anthropology will proceed. It must begin with christology, and thus with the human being who is the divine address to all other creatures. From this picture of Christ it must then abstract some basic principles about human beings, precisely as hearers of the divine address embodied and performed in and by this one particular and unique human being. Both the similarities and differences between Christ and those who see themselves in him will be equally important to the way in which Christ is to function as a model and ethical reference point for Barth's description of the human agent (30-44, 53).

If the norm and criteria for his anthropology are external to the dogmatician, and if, furthermore, no other site than Christ sheds revelatory light on the self, this is because these other bodies of human knowledge can at best give us an account of a human nature corrupted and distorted by sin. It is precisely because these accounts themselves are the product of a corrupted and distorted human activity that we cannot recognize in them our own sinfulness unless we have already been enlightened and brought to repentance by a vision of ourselves in the mirror of the Word (26-40). This point will prove especially significant for my purposes

when Barth later declines to make Christ's sexed identity theologically significant to his relationship with other human beings and yet goes on to assert sexual difference as the fundamental site of inter-human alterity, all while refusing to make explicit recourse to psychological, biological, scientific accounts of sexual difference to clarify or explain why or how so. It will contribute in part to his loss of words when it comes to describing sexual difference and the order it entails. For Barth will not want to relinquish his methodological aversion to natural theology, even if he must rely on the assumptions that support these spheres of knowledge in order to assert that sexual difference is the fundamental site of inter-human alterity.

In keeping with this christological method for theological anthropology, §44 ("Man as the Creature of God") and §45 ("Man in his Determination as the Covenant-Partner of God") each begin with a christological section from which Barth then develops some anthropological implications. The two commandments (love of God and love of neighbor), structure the ethically-funded account of human agency that he develops in these two paragraphs, just as they did explicitly in §18 and implicitly in §41. §44.1 begins with the divine identity and determination of Christ, God's revelatory address; it follows his ecstatic movement toward (and for the sake of) the needy human creature, through the dogmatic registers of incarnation, election and trinity. In §44.3, the human agent, constituted as the object of this movement, becomes a subject as it responds in a countermovement of gratitude. §45.1 begins with the human identity of Christ, and it describes his responsiveness to, and activity on behalf of, his needy human fellows. In §45.2 the human agent, the beneficiary of a gift that it can never return in kind, must pattern its own (self-revealing, aid-lending) activity after the benevolent activity of Christ. Christ's initiating grace thus finds its analogue in the ethical impulse that drives "I" towards

“Thou”: the “I” must come to the aid of the “Thou” from whom it requires the same aid, and it must act even at the risk of not receiving in kind. In §45.3, Barth introduces an ordered relationship between the sexes (with marriage as the norm) as *the* relational site in which this imitation of Christ is most fully realized, and it is here that the full-pattern of a self-risking movement toward the other becomes a male prerogative, and it is here that Barth’s account of inter-human fellowship is imported into a heteronormative framework. Together §44 and §45 give us a human agent who is constituted as the beneficiary of Christ’s saving activity and is directed toward the neighbor. Having received from the Good Samaritan a gift it can never repay, the “I” is to play Christ to the needy other.

THE LOVE OF GOD (§44)

The Christological Agent

Christ models for Barth an ecstatic and gratuitous movement outward toward the creaturely other. Christ reiterates this pattern at every ontological level: in his incarnate identity as Word made flesh, in his identity as elected and electing God, and in his triune identity as Son (and spoken Word) of the Father. From any angle that Barth considers Christ, he is always already moving outward in response to the needs of the creaturely other, and the human agent is to conform itself to this outward movement.

Barth deploys the concept of history (*Geschichte*) to capture what is at stake for human beings in this movement, specifically the constitutive role the other plays for the self.

The history of a being begins, continues and is completed when something other than itself and transcending its own nature encounters it, approaches it and determines its being in the nature proper to it, so that it is compelled and enabled to transcend itself in response and in relation to this new factor. The history of a being occurs when it is caught up in this movement, change and relation, when its circular movement is broken from without by a movement towards it and the corresponding movement from it, when it is

transcended from without so that it must and can transcend itself outwards....It exists, then, in so far as it takes place that that other, that new factor which is foreign to its own nature and the closed circle of its state, encounters it and approaches it, in so far as it moves and is changed in response and in relation to that other. (158)

Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, is the archetype of what Barth has in mind here; he is “primal history” (*Urgeschichte*) (157/188): For if “the Creator is for the creature the utterly new and other,” and if “the man Jesus is Himself the Creator who has become creature,” then in Christ we have “the fulfilment of the strict concept of history” (159/190). In Christ (the Word-made-flesh) the circle of possibilities proper to the human creature’s state is transcended, for Christ’s ontological make-up is the embodiment of this dynamic movement of Creator to creature and creature to Creator. All other human beings are at best only copies of this archetype; they will have a “history” as they participate in this history. As the Creator-become-creature addresses them he enables them to transcend their own set of creaturely possibilities in a response of grateful recognition and acceptance (161).

Barth describes Christ’s divine identity and determination as this archetypal history. He is the actualization and execution of the eternal will of the triune God to elect, create, and sustain fellowship with the human creature, specifically by assuming a human nature to the Son. Barth strategically evokes analogies between Christ’s incarnate identity, his identity as electing and elected God, and his identity as Son of the Father. In doing so he secures Christ’s divine and revelatory credentials within the eternal, electing, triune decision of Father, Son, and Spirit to establish and maintain a covenantal relationship with this one particular human being, and in him all others.

The man Jesus, and again we start with Him, is the sum of the divine address, the Word of God, to the created cosmos. It is in this way that He is the primary object of God’s eternal counsel, of the divine predestination and election. It is in this way that He is the embodiment of the divine will to save. It is in this way that He forms the Counterpart of man, and that it is really true in Him that man is with God, and derives from God and is

elected by God. All this is concretely expressed in the fact that the man Jesus is the Word of God; that He is to the created world and therefore ad extra what the Son of God as the eternal Logos is within the triune being of God. If the eternal Logos is the Word in which God speaks with Himself, thinks Himself and is conscious of Himself, then in its identity with the man Jesus it is the Word in which God thinks the cosmos, speaks with the cosmos and imparts to the cosmos the consciousness of its God. It is this second meaning of the Word of God which concerns us here. God's will for His creature is at one and the same time-and the two aspects cannot be separated, nor one placed lower or higher than the other-a will which reveals as well as acts, and illuminates as well as quickens. And the object of His election of grace is a creature which not only acts concretely but speaks concretely, acting as it speaks and speaking as it acts, the fountain of light as well as life within the created world. The Creator makes Himself heard and understood and recognised by becoming this creature, the man Jesus, and by acting as the Saviour of the creature in this man. In His action He declares Himself and the purpose of what He does. His action is not, therefore, a mechanical operation in which the creature is simply the material used and has no understanding of what is done. He uses the creature as He speaks with it. The omnipotence of His action is the omnipotence of truth, which refuses to dominate by external means, but is ready to speak for itself, to teach, to convince, to seek and win recognition, and to conquer in this highly individual manner. (147-8/177)

The ecstatic pattern of activity of the man Jesus Christ is coherent and consistent to the incarnational movement of the Son outward toward the creature, as it is also with the pattern of activity that the Son and Word of the Father performs from eternity. Thus Christ's orientation toward his fellows reveals an ontological openness intrinsic to the eternal being and decision of God. For God eternally elects to establish fellowship with a creaturely other by bringing the man Jesus into the most intimate union with the Son.

In evoking these analogies, Barth not only secures the revelatory credentials of Christ, at the same time he locates his model human agent, Jesus Christ, within the inter-trinitarian relations, as the object of trinitarian electing decision. From eternity this human being is already in the mind and will of God, as the object of God's election.¹⁰ From eternity God has elected to

¹⁰ Barth writes: "If the saving work of Jesus consists in His laying down His life for His friends, this is the same thing, only in its aspect as self-revealing work, as is elsewhere ([John] 3:16) described as God's so loving the world that He gave His only begotten Son. The giving of the Son by the Father indicates a mystery, a hidden movement in the inner life of the Godhead. But in the self-sacrifice of the man Jesus for His friends this intra-divine movement is no longer hidden but revealed. For what the man Jesus does by this action is to lay bare this mystery, to actualise the human and therefore the visible and knowable and apprehensible aspect of this portion of the divine history of this primal moment of divine volition and execution" (66-7).

establish the union of this one human being with the Son, a union that does not consume but sustains the alterity of the creature. While Barth does not develop his anthropology from his doctrine of the Trinity (from the inter-trinitarian relations) but from the incarnate Christ instead, it is by way of his doctrine of election that Barth is able to secure his anthropological anchor (the specific human nature of Jesus Christ) within the eternal movement and fellowship of triune life. He situates his anthropological criterion at the loftiest site of dogmatic reflection, but always as an anthropological (not a trinitarian) criterion. There will be no need for Barth to look back behind Christ to the inner strictly-divine relationship of Father and Son for an understanding of human agency and fellowship, for from eternity in the primal history of Father, Son and Spirit, the triune God has resolved to bind the human creature Jesus Christ with the Son. Christ, this primal history, is thus the central locus for all dogmatic reflection about both Creator and creature.

In presenting “the man Jesus” as the realization, execution and revelation of the Creator’s eternal electing decision, Barth at points uses penetrative, even violent, imagery to capture the dynamic and disruptive force of his christological agent. He refers to him as “the penetrating spearhead of the will of God their Creator: penetrating because in Him the will of God is already fulfilled and revealed, and the purpose of God for all men and creatures has thus reached its goal; and the spearhead to the extent that there has still to be a wider fulfilment of the will of God and its final consummation” (143).¹¹ As we shall see shortly, this spear penetrates the creature as the spoken, self-revealing, saving address of the Word-made-flesh. Christ’s teachings, his life, his

¹¹ Barth continues: “the man Jesus is the executive and revelatory spearhead of the will of God fulfilled on behalf of creation”(144); “And because it is grace, grace as free mercy, and not therefore a self-evident compulsion or necessity, which God obeyed when He entertained towards His creation this will to save; because it is again His free choice to give His saving will this spearhead, to realise and reveal it in this One, it is right and necessary that we should see in this one man Jesus the true and primary object of the divine election of grace” (144).

interactions with his fellows, correspond to, reflect and reveal the Creator's "almighty address and summons" (148/177). This is forceful phallic imagery, and while Barth uses it only occasionally, it raises the question of whether such supporting imagery is implicated in Barth's efforts to restrain the ways in which women are to imitate this pattern of activity, and to preserve it as a special prerogative for men. Barth does not, however, consistently employ such penetrative imagery for depicting the ecstatic, self-transcending, activity of Christ. In §45 Barth will soften and temper the force of this imagery by emphasizing Christ's responsiveness to the needs of his fellows and the ways in which he allows himself to be completely and totally disposed by those needs, to the point of giving his life away in tears and suffering, to literal nails and spear, being himself penetrated and pierced. It is, of course, this divinely willed end that the penetrating spearhead executes and realizes.

The Human Agent

In §44.3 Barth locates his ideal anthropological agent within the creaturely sphere into which this spearhead has penetrated, as the target of its aim: "As man he is the creature who is first struck by the spearhead of the gracious will of God penetrating the world of creation, and first illuminated by the light which streams from it"(145).¹² But this spearhead is none other than Jesus Christ who does his self-disclosing, revelatory saving work in the veil of a creaturely Neighbour (*Nachbar*), Companion (*Genosse*), and Brother (*Bruder*),¹³ in whom we are to recognize one both like and unlike ourselves. To be pierced by this spearhead is to be the hearer of this Neighbor's address.

¹² Barth writes: "It is he himself who is affected when God invades his sphere....in the sphere to which Jesus as man also belongs he is reached and pierced by God however much he may wriggle" (141).

¹³ For his use and favoring of this constellation of terms see 133/159, 135/160-1, 160/191.

The human agent is constituted as an answer to that address. There is no human nature to consider apart from and prior to this awakening, responding, countermovement, no doer behind this deed (150, 152, 161-2). Human beings are the objects of a divine summons that awakens them to the activity of responding subjects. They are thus both receptive and spontaneous.¹⁴ They are the recipients of a gift that imposes an obligation as it calls them to respond accordingly: namely, by conforming themselves to the activity performed on their behalf, by striving to act as that which this revelatory address reveals them to be—the beloved objects of God’s love (170/203-4). As they do so they are called and drawn into Christ’s history, transcending their own creaturely limitations, capacities, and possibilities in an ecstatic answer to the divine address (141, 174, 191, 158).

Barth describes human existence first as gratitude (*Dankbarkeit*) and then as responsibility (*Verantwortlichkeit*) (166-202). As gratitude human existence is “a word of thanks” in response to “a Word of grace” (175).¹⁵ To be grateful is to not only receive and enjoy a benefit but to understand the benefit as a gift that one could not have acquired for oneself (167/199). A grateful existence is driven by the awareness of a debt to the benefactor that can never be fully discharged:

To be grateful is to recognise and honour as a benefactor the one who has conferred this good. Gratitude implies obligation towards the benefactor; an obligation which will be manifested and proved in a certain attitude towards the benefactor, but which cannot be exhaustively expressed in any attitude. If the obligation of thanksgiving could be fully

¹⁴ Barth attends both to the “objective and receptive” and the “subjective and spontaneous” dimensions of this agent (170/203-4). The former denotes the human as object of divine activity, the latter as responding subject (conforming itself to that summons), and in §45.2 the human agent will be both receptive to the activity of its other and spontaneous in its movement toward it.

¹⁵ Barth writes: “This means that man is, as he not only receives and accepts as a benefit the promise of God, but also understands that this is a gift which he could not win for himself, a deed which he has not himself wrought, an event to which he has not contributed and which he has not deserved. To see this acceptance as such is to see real man in his own action, not merely as the object but as the subject of the history in which his being consists. For when we see him as the being responsive and complementary to the grace of God, as a being in gratitude, we see him for the first time” (168).

discharged in an attitude towards the benefactor, there would be no real gratitude, just as a benefit which could be cancelled by an attitude on the part of the recipient would certainly not have been a benefit. In such a case both the benefit and the gratitude would simply have been the two sides of a transaction based on mutual self-interest. Where a genuine benefit calls for thanks, and where genuine thanks respond to a benefit, there arises a relationship which, created by one party, can only be accepted by the other, and not cancelled but continually renewed. (167/199, see also 168)

Gratitude thus points to the asymmetrical and irreversible character of divine movement and human countermovement. This particular notion of a transaction based on mutual self-interest will be an important point to recall later when we turn to the inter-human relationship of §45.2. There each human being shares the same need, and each depends on the gratuitous aid of the other. Yet the agent must act at the risk of not receiving in-kind, in order to imitate the grace of the divine benefactor. Human fellowship is not, therefore, a two-sided “transaction based on mutual self-interest” where I give aid only to those I anticipate will respond in kind. For while I depend on the aid of the other to be fully human, as the beneficiary of Christ’s saving activity, I am to lend aid at the risk of not receiving, in turn, what I need. It is in this way that Barth secures ethical spontaneity as the driving force of human agency.

If human existence is one of gratitude for a benefit that can never be returned in kind, it is also one of responsibility as it conforms and directs itself as an answer to the divine address. The human subject hears, knows, and acknowledges (*erkennen*) this gift, and in so doing knows the Benefactor:

To hear a word as such, and receive what it declares, is to know [*erkennen*]. Hence to hear and accept the Word of God is to know God. To be man in responsibility [*Verantwortung*] before God is to know God. Man knows God because God declares to him His Word, and therefore first knows him. For this reason it takes place as a spontaneous act of gratitude, in which the history inaugurated by God becomes man's own subjective history, that, following on that divine knowledge by the Word as thunder follows lightning, man knows God. Thanksgiving is a readiness to acknowledge. It is a matter of knowing the God who tells man in His Word that He is gracious to him, and therefore of knowing this benefit. But the Benefactor Himself, His own saving and keeping initiative on behalf of mankind, is this benefit, just as His Word in the creaturely

mode of existence is again Himself, God the Creator. To know grace as His work is thus to know God Himself as the gracious God. As this takes place, as man does this, he fulfils his responsibility before God and therefore fulfils his own being. (176/210)

The cognitive dimensions of this divine movement and human countermovement will find a parallel in §45.2 when Barth emphasizes the self-revealing dialogical dimensions in the movement of the “I” from and to its “Thou.”

When speaking of responsibility Barth stresses the spontaneity and persistent motion of the human agent as it conducts, shapes, and expresses itself as an answer to a preceding divine directive (175)—as it becomes history.¹⁶ To live responsibly (to live as a response), is to be always in motion, reaching beyond the limits of one’s own sphere of possibilities, toward the Word, in pursuit of a fresh hearing of the address. It has a cognitive dimension (the very dimension that drives the dogmatic project), for it is a search to hear and understand again and again the Word that provides the direction in which it is to seek. Only on this path toward knowing and hearing the Word, do human beings acquire a knowledge of themselves; this knowledge is reflected in the gift that tells them that they are the objects of grace called to respond gratefully, and so they are ecstatic beings, always on the way to a center beyond themselves (178). Capturing the persistent motion of the human agent, Barth writes:

Coming from where I can have nothing behind me but the Word of God, I find myself on the way to God, my Saviour and Keeper, apart from whom I can have nothing before me. There alone do I have the future of my being. There alone do I find myself before myself. But there where I am moving as I seek and know and call upon God, I do really find the future of my being as it must be saved and kept by God. Without God, and without seeking, knowing and calling upon Him, I could find there only my abandonment to nothing, my lostness. And then, moving to my future, I could only be nothing. (178)

¹⁶ Barth writes: “To this extent it is an act of responsibility. Man is, and is human, as he performs this act of responsibility, offering Himself as the response to the Word of God, and conducting, shaping and expressing himself as an answer to it. He is, and is man, as he does this” (175).

This quotation captures the actualism and dynamism of Barth's understanding of human agency, and there is no place here for the sort of agentail restraint with which Barth will soon attempt to restrict female activity.

Just as he does in §18, Barth presents the human agent as a lover of God, in a persistent movement toward one whose activity makes this movement possible. In §18 the love of God finds its tangible reference point in the love of the neighbor, as it does also for Adam in §41. In the §45, Barth repeats this same move, evoking the parable of the Good Samaritan and the two commandments to draw the analogy between love of God and love of neighbor. We will see that the beneficiaries of divine grace are to play the benefactor to other human beings.

THE LOVE OF NEIGHBOR (§45.1-2)

The Christological Agent

Having described the godward orientation of the human being, in §45 Barth lays the christological grounds for its humanward orientation. He draws attention to the correspondence between Christ's two determinations: his existence as Word made flesh and his existence as this one human being among his fellows (i.e. his divine identity and his human identity). The eternal electing and incarnating ecstatic movement of the Son into creation corresponds to, materializes, and manifests itself in the relationships Jesus Christ has with other human beings, as depicted in the Gospel narratives. Christ exists not for his own sake but exclusively and totally for the deliverance of his human fellows, for in this way he is the actualization in time and space of God's eternal election (205-9).

To secure this analogy Barth evokes the two commandments and the parable of the Good Samaritan. It is specifically in the figure of Jesus Christ (the incarnate God) that we see that the

two commandments are analogous, corresponding yet not identical: Christ is the law of God gifted and imposed on us, directing us to the love of God and of neighbor; and Christ's ontological structure shows the unity and distinction between these two commands, just as it also models for Barth the self-transcending movement of "history."¹⁷ He writes:

It [the two-fold command] has reference to God, but also to the neighbour. It has the one dimension, but also the other. It finds in the Creator the One who points it to this creature, fellow-man. And it finds in this creature, fellow-man, the one who points it to the Creator. Receiving and taking seriously both these references in their different ways, it is both love for God and love for the neighbour. Thus the structure of the humanity of Jesus Himself is revealed in this twofold command. It repeats the unity of His divinity and humanity as this is achieved without admixture or change, and yet also without separation or limitation. (217/258)

To hear the divine address spoken in Christ is to encounter our human neighbor and Benefactor, Christ himself, who points us in the direction that his own activity is oriented –toward our fellow human beings. With the parable of the Good Samaritan Barth configures Christ as that neighbor gifted to us, whom we must follow if we are to know who our neighbors are (and what our obligation to them is). In this one particular neighbor the two different loves, the love of God and love of neighbor, converge:

According to the New Testament, this sympathy, help, deliverance and mercy, this active solidarity with the state and fate of man, is the concrete correlative of His divinity, of His anointing with the Spirit and power, of His equality with God, of His wealth....on the presupposition of His divinity, His humanity consists wholly and exhaustively in the fact that He is for man, in the fulfilment of His saving work. Similarly, His prophetic message and miracles, His life and death, stand under the sign of this relationship. He is wholly the Good Samaritan of Lk. 10:29f. who had compassion on the man who fell among

¹⁷ "For a true understanding, we can and must think of what is popularly called the two-fold law of love-for God and the neighbour (Mk. 12:29-31 and par.). It is no accident that it was Jesus who summed up the Law and the prophets in this particular way. He was speaking primarily and decisively of the law of His own twofold yet not opposed but harmonious orientation. He declared Himself, and therefore the grace of God manifested in Him, to be the sum of the Law. The two commandments do not stand in absolute confrontation. It is clear that Jesus did not regard love for God and love for the neighbour as separate but conjoined. Yet they are not identical. In Mt. 22:38 the command to love God is expressly called the first and great commandment, and the command to love the neighbour is placed alongside it as the second. God is not the neighbour, nor the neighbour God. Hence love for God cannot be simply and directly love for the neighbour. Yet the command to love the neighbour is not merely an appended, subordinate and derivative command. If it is the second, it is also described as like unto the first in Mt. 22:39" (216-7/255).

thieves and thus showed Himself a neighbour to him. And if the parable concludes with the words: "Go, and do thou likewise," this is equivalent to: "Follow thou me," and in this way a crushing answer is given to the question of the scribe: "And who is my neighbour?" He will find his neighbour if he follows the man Jesus. Our first and general thesis can be summed up in the formula of the second article of the creed of Nicæa-Constantinople: *qui propter nos homines et salutem nostram descendit de coelis et incarnatus est*. The fact that the Son of God became identical with the man Jesus took place *propter nos*, for the sake of His fellow-men, and *propter salutem nostram*, that He might be their Good Samaritan. (210/250-51)

We will shortly watch the human "I" of §45.2 follow the direction and orientation of the Good Samaritan as it seeks and comes to the aid of its "Thou."

Before turning to §45.2, some features in Barth's description of Christ's work on behalf of his fellows will cast a light on the mimetic activity of the "I" in §45.2 and the male prerogative of §45.3. First, it is the aid-lending orientation of Christ's activity that find its analogue in the ethical impulse that drives "I" toward "Thou" in §45.2, and it reappears as a male prerogative in §45.3. As with all Barth's analogies, the differences are as significant as the similarities. Christ's movement toward his fellows differs from its human analogue because Christ's relationship with his fellows lacks the mutuality and reciprocity of the inter-human I-Thou relation described in §45.2. Christ does for his fellows what they cannot in turn do for him; they need from him what he does not need from them (212/252-3). The same cannot be said of the "I" and its "Thou" in §45.2, for together they share the same need for and obligation to the other. Yet Barth wants to capture in the inter-human relationship something of the gratuity of Christ's activity. Of Christ he writes:

He moves towards the Thou from which He comes. Disposed by it, He disposes Himself wholly and utterly towards it....He has only one goal: to maintain the cause of these men in death and the conquest of death; to offer up His life for them that they may live and be happy. He therefore serves them, without prospect of reward or repayment, without expecting to receive anything from them which He cannot have far better and more richly without them. (215-6/256-7)

It is the gratuitous responsiveness of Christ's movement toward the other that the "I" is to imitate in its own modest way by spontaneously moving to the aid of the other at the risk of not receiving the same benefit in turn.

Second, it is this gratuitous movement of Christ itself that will later coincide analogically with male prerogative. Of Christ Barth writes:

the glory of His humanity is simply to be so fully claimed and clamped by His fellows, by their state and fate, by their lowliness and misery; to have no other cause but that of the fatal Adam whom He now allows to be really the first, giving him the precedence, ranging Himself wholly with him for his salvation as the second Adam. If there is indeed a powerful I of Jesus, it is only from this Thou, from fallen Adam, from the race which springs from him, from Israel and the sequence of its generations, from a succession of rebels, from a history which is the history of its unfaithfulness. He is pleased to have His life only from His apostles, His community, those whom He called His own and who constantly forsook and forsake Him. He is pleased to be called by them to His own life, to be given the meaning of His life by them. He is pleased to be nothing but the One who is supremely compromised by all these, the Representative and Bearer of all the alien guilt and punishment transferred from them to Him. (215/256)

This captures what Barth will try to preserve for the male when he introduces the Ephesians 5 bridal metaphor, in which the husband gives himself for his wife as Christ gives himself for the Church. If we recall Barth's use of an order of origin to subordinate Eve to Adam in III/1, we should note that in the above quotation, coming second in an order of sequence does not impinge on the second Adam's role as "supreme I," acting on behalf of the needy first Adam. As I demonstrated in Chapter 3, sequential order does not always subordinate the second term, as it does in the case of Eve and all her sex. When Barth introduces order in §45.3 it will be the man's prerogative to conform himself to this aid-lending activity on behalf of a female "Thou," and Barth will not explain how a shared need and obligation on the part of both sexes can be reconciled with this prerogative.

Third, sexual difference is not operative in Barth's depiction of Christ's relationship to his fellows, nor will it play any role in structuring the difference between "I" and "Thou" in

§45.2. This difference arrives later with the intervention of the marital metaphor of Ephesians 5 in §45.3. Barth does not so much as mention Christ's sexed male identity. In fact a passing comment in a later paragraph (§46 "Man as Soul and Body") implies that Barth's silence over this particular detail is not a mere oversight. Noting the minimal details the Gospels provide regarding the physical life of Jesus, his birth, family, health, hunger, thirst, and so on, Barth writes that from the vantage point of the Gospels,

It is clearly no concern of ours whether Jesus was ever sick. An impenetrable veil of silence lies over the fact that He was a male (Jn. 4:27). The noteworthy thing is the absence of both positive and negative information on both points. No attention is paid to the health or to the celibacy of Jesus, nor are these things even mentioned. The fact of His corporeality is crucially important. The substance and nature of this fact, which are so desirable and even necessary to a biographer, remain fundamentally hidden, and can be supplied only by an imagination whose methods have nothing in common with what the New Testament has to say to us. (329-30)

Barth's model christological agent of §45.1 and his model anthropological agent of §45.2 are thus presented to the reader without any reference to the difference that will, in §45.3, structure Barth's account of all inter-human fellowship, and with it his theological anthropology. It is especially striking that Barth should refer to a "veil of silence" regarding Christ's male identity and his celibacy, for this would suggest that while sexual identity is central to the existence of all other human beings it is not of relevance to who Christ is as a human being and what he does for humankind. Barth's christological commitments thus undermine his efforts to privilege sexual difference as the central site for inter-human fellowship and the constitutive site for human bodily specificity (as will become clear in §54).

Christ's "Thou" is not a single embodied female human being (even if it later acquires a dubious female identity in Barth's use of Ephesians 5). In §45.1 Barth does not attempt to gender Christ's others but relies instead on non-marital imagery for depicting this relationship. In a series of statements, Barth uses language to characterize Christ's relationship to his creaturely

“Thou” that resists the dyadic rigidity and fixed alterity of his later depiction of the sexual relationship: Christ “interposes Himself for Adam, for the race, for Israel, for His disciples and community” (215-6/256-7); “if we see Him, we see with and around Him in ever widening circles His disciples, the people, His enemies and the countless millions who have not yet heard His name” (216/257); “Jesus has to let His being, Himself, be prescribed and dictated and determined by an alien human being (that of His more near and distant fellows)” (214-5/256). Barth here evokes the sort of differences at play in his §18 reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan. By §54 these “near and distant fellows” (*nahen und fernen Mitmenschen*) will comprise a third sphere of inter-human relationships, alongside the relationship between man and woman and between parent and child. But unlike these two other spheres, it is not a fixed difference and irreversible relationship: it is a difference demarcated by language, geography and customs, and history, and as such it is a fluid distinction that the “I” is obligated to transgress and renegotiate as it moves toward a knowledge of the other, rather than to police and maintain (as will prove to be the case with sexual difference). It is this more general movement across difference that I will argue has a strong christological grounding in Barth’s account. It can be foregrounded to unsettle, relativize, and de-center the place Barth wants to give to sexual difference and marriage in III/2. Barth’s christological grounding of theological anthropology provides a strong resource for resisting his heteronormative framing of human fellowship and for opening it up to multiple ways of playing Christ to the other. As we shall see, sexual difference retains an important function for Barth because he assumes a givenness to the alterity between the sexes that he never examines or describes, a givenness readily susceptible to critique on his own terms.

Barth concludes §45.1 by once again securing Christ's revelatory credentials in an "analogy of relations" that moves through incarnation, election, and trinity. It is here that he makes some of the statements that lead many critics to identify the inter-trinitarian relation between Father and Son as the primary analogue after which the relationship between the sexes is patterned. Here Barth identifies the humanity of Jesus as the *imago Dei* and as such the "repetition and reflection of God Himself" (218-219). He also speaks of a "co-existence, co-inherence and reciprocity" in the immanent triune life of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In making these references, however, Barth is not attempting to establish the trinitarian foundation for the relationship between the sexes. Instead he is tracking a pattern of revelatory activity reiterated at the levels of incarnation, election, and trinity. His concern is to secure the dependability of the loving character of God in every relationship that God constitutes.¹⁸ Barth aims to reassure his

¹⁸ Barth's description of the "analogy of relations" here has prompted many interpreters of Barth's ordering of the sexes to pursue analogies in ordering rather than analogies in patterns of activity. However, in this particular passage it is especially clear that Barth is following one divine actor through a nexus of relationships that his activity constitutes, for the purpose of securing the coherence and consistency of this agent's self-revealing activity. His focus is on the actor and his pattern of benevolent activity, as it graciously constitutes relationships with other beings (i.e. "history" as a self-transcending movement toward another). It is this same actor and pattern of activity that he follows through the christological sections of §44.1 and §45, and after whom he patterns his anthropological actor.

Barth at one point contributes to this reading of the analogy of relations as an over-arching map of dyads, although in this particular text Barth actually discourages this sort of approach. The text comes toward the end of §46 treatment of the doctrine of human soul and body. Here Barth identifies several analogies (heavens-earth, Creator-creature, Christ-church, male-female) all of which he finds illuminate his depiction of the human being as a ruling soul of a serving body, for all analogies entail a seamless unity of ruling and serving activity. He does not develop any of these analogies; he simply draws attention to the correspondence in the ordering of activity. It is precisely this sort of hasty and superficial move that prompts a reading with an eye for overarching patterns of order. However Barth actually tells his readers here that he does not deduce his understanding of man as soul and body from these analogies; they at best cast only "a supplemental light", for "they say both too much and too little to permit us to draw direct conclusions about man from them." I would suggest they tell us nothing useful at all precisely because they say both too much and too little and so obfuscate all he has said in the previous paragraph about the relationship between the sexes. In §45.2 he does not actually speak of a ruling man and a serving woman, rather he attempts to avoid such a notion by construing male privilege as a primacy of service directed to the needs of the other and patterned after Christ's saving activity; he does the same in §54. Barth tells us only that this "supplemental light" illumines "the order, rationality and logicity which consists in the ruling and serving which so mysteriously pervade the whole work of the Creator with His creation" (III/2, 427). As I noted above in fn. 3 the force of such language resides precisely in its superficiality, which has the effect of imposing a distorting framework onto Barth's carefully developed depictions of human agency.

For helpful resources on the centrality of Christ's activity in driving Barth's "analogy of relations" and his theological anthropology see: Eberhard Jüngel, "Die Möglichkeit theologischer Anthropologie auf dem Grunde der Analogie. Eine Untersuchung zum Analogieverständnis Karl Barths," in *Barth-Studien*, ed. Eberhard Jüngel

readers that in Christ we encounter a divine movement toward ourselves that is consistent and coherent with God's way of being at every relational level that we consider. At every level Barth shows his readers that there are no surprises to be feared; there is no ungracious, damning, or indifferent God hidden out of sight but always a God who acts in consistency with the Good Samaritan neighbor who disposes himself so completely for our salvation (217-219). It is in this sense that Jesus Christ is himself the *imago Dei* (219/261). Barth's analogy of relations thus foregrounds a pattern of divine gratuitous activity outward on behalf of others. Human beings are to conform themselves to this activity, and to the extent that they do so, they become a likeness of the *imago Dei*. In §45.2 Barth will depict the activity of the human "I" as an analogous, gratuitous, self-revealing, aid lending movement toward a "Thou." This will be Barth's human model of neighbor love.

The Human Agent

In §45.2, Barth gives a detailed depiction of the "correspondence and similarity" [Entsprechung und Ähnlichkeit] (225/268) between the human agent and Christ. The differences are as noteworthy as the similarities. Human beings are like Christ in so far as their existence is thoroughly determined by their fellows (227/272) (analogous to their determination by the divine address). In this sense their existence is also a "history." They differ from Christ because they cannot do for their fellows what Christ does for them. Christ bestows a benefit on his fellows that he does not himself require; he meets a need he does not himself share, and so his relationship to them is irreversible. Every other human being needs from the other what he or she is obligated to

(Zürich-Köln: Benzinger Verlag, 1982), 210-32; John Macken, *The Autonomy Theme in the "Church Dogmatics,"* 142-53; Keith L. Johnson, *Karl Barth and the "Analogia Entis"* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 191-223. For a book-length investigation that recognizes the analogical crafting of human activity after divine activity, specifically with respect to Barth's ethics, see Gerald McKenney, *Analogy of Grace*.

give to the other, and it is this shared need and shared obligation that underlies the widely-appreciated mutuality and reciprocity of Barth's account (243/291).¹⁹ Barth locates the ethical burden of human agency precisely in its (very modest) imitation of Christ's incarnational activity: the would-be imitator of Christ moves toward and comes to the aid of the other at the risk of not receiving in kind what it aims to give. Like Christ, then, it puts itself at risk of misunderstanding and rejection. It is the initiative and spontaneity of this benevolent activity on behalf of the other (and thus the ethical impulse in Barth's account) that the male will soon appropriate in §45.3 and §54.

In this section I support this reading of §45.2 by foregrounding the ways in which the human agent's movement toward its other parallel's Christ's movement toward his fellows, not only in imitating his gratuity, but in the self-revelatory character of that movement. These parallels will prove especially important for interpreting Barth's account of sexual difference and the relationship between the sexes, and we will need the excessive and often repetitive detail he offers in §45.2 to cast light on the murky, mystifying minimal words he gives to describing the order between the sexes in §45.3 and §54. There Barth exhibits a descriptive reticence that he does not display in §45.2.²⁰

¹⁹ Barth writes: "But only the humanity of Jesus can be absolutely exhaustively and exclusively described as a being for man. There can be no question of a total being for others as the determination of any other men but Jesus. And to the humanity of other men there necessarily belongs reciprocity. Others are for them as they are for others. This reciprocity cannot arise in the humanity of Jesus with its irreversible "for." We are thus satisfied to describe the humanity generally with which we are now dealing as a being of the one with the other, and we shall have to show to what extent this includes a certain being of the one for the other" (243/291).

²⁰ While many critics find the reciprocity and mutuality of §45.2 to be the corrective to Barth's ordering of the sexes, not all critics agree with this assessment. Fraser and Rogers argue the problems of §45.3 are already rooted in §45.2, specifically in the loss of key features of its christological grounding in the §45.1 depiction of Christ's fellowship with other humans. Fraser finds that Christ's prioritizing of the "other" in §45.1 gives way in §45.2 to the priority of the "I," which in §45.3 becomes the priority of the male ("Karl Barth's Doctrine of Humanity"; Fraser, "Jesus' Humanity and Ours in the Theology of Karl Barth," 179-96). Rogers argues that the communal features of Christ's relationship to a wide range of people in §45.1 gives way to a dyadic I/Thou exchange in §45.2 that loses its christocentric focus, which then in §45.3 takes a heteronormative turn as it fixes marriage as *the* paradigmatic ethical

relationship (*Sexuality and the Christian Body*; Rogers, "Supplementing Barth on Jews and Gender," 69). What Barth does in §45.2, they suspect, aids rather than undermines a framework and ethical trajectory resistant to a strong account of gender equality.

Fraser's analysis and critical intervention into Barth's ordering of the sexes shares features of my own reading, for it is duly attentive to the dominant function of Christ in the crafting of Barth's theological anthropology, and it finds resources for a critical reconstruction in Barth's §18 use of the parable of the Good Samaritan and in Christ's relationship to human beings (§45.1). However, like many others, she is focused on tracking an irreversible order within binary pairs, rather than following a recurring pattern of activity. As a result she sees in the I/Thou relation of §45.2 an order that prioritizes self over "other," and so she does not recognize the ways in which the spontaneous activity of the "I" toward the "Thou" reflects the gracious movement of Christ toward and on behalf of the needs of his others. She looks to §18 and §45.1 to find a critical corrective to the problems that begin in §45.2, however I am arguing that what she appreciates in these other resources is actually present in §45.2 (and indeed in many of the relational sites she finds to be problematic). The divine agent's movement toward the creaturely other is that which constitutes the many relationships Fraser finds to be problematically ordered, and it is this movement that propels the human "I" of §45.2 toward its "Thou." This movement of the agent toward and on behalf of the needs of the other (what she calls the priority of the other) plays out in the registers of Trinity, election, incarnation, and anthropology. The problem is not that the "I" in §45.2 occupies a privileged place over the "Thou," but rather that the agency exhibited in §45.2 and patterned after the movement of the divine agent comes to be fully appropriated only by the male in §45.3.

Rogers argues that Barth's use of I/Thou phenomenology in §45.2 stands in tension with his commitments to Bible, Trinity and Church and also with his christocentric method precisely because of its dualism. I/Thou phenomenology when used as a lens for reading biblical narratives, tends to reduce co-humanity to co-individuality. It thus effaces the ecclesial nature of the biblical healing stories, which center on a Christ working mostly in crowds; it hides the presence of third parties and ecclesial mediation (disciples, crowds, friends). In spite of the bridal imagery of Eph. 5, it does not capture God's relationship to Church and Israel (which would demand the second person plural instead). As an imitation of the imago Dei, it falls short of the likeness to the triunity of the creator, for it elides the place for the work of Holy Spirit which is not easily reducible to a Thou (a place analogous to those very third parties he elides in the scriptures). Thus, by framing fellow-humanity in terms of a binary I/Thou encounter Barth wanders from his Christocentric focus (and its embeddedness in biblical narratives); he replaces the community with a single other who, in §45.3 becomes a member of the opposite sex. Rogers argues that had Barth been true to these commitments, and had he not been so fixed on establishing a basis for compulsory heterosexuality, he might have seen in the I/Thou the condition for the variety of relationships that Christ enacted (*Sexuality and the Christian Body*, 180-91).

From the vantage point of §45.3, my analysis agrees with Rogers's criticism of the dyadic emphasis Barth gives to his I/Thou exchange, insofar as it lends itself to Barth's fixing of marriage as the central site for the realization of human fellowship. However, I am arguing that §45.2 is carefully patterned after Christ's relationship with a community of near and distant fellows (§45.1); furthermore within the framework of §45.2 Barth's emphasis on the singularity of the "Thou" aims to secure the irreducible character of the "Thou" and its resistance to categorical reductions of a collective. The "I" must not reduce the "Thou" to a group, but rather the "I" must allow the self-interpretation of the "Thou" to unsettle and correct precisely the sort of assumptions that arise from reducing the other to such collectives. In this respect, the singularity of the "Thou" serves the ethical dimensions of human responsibility. These ethical dimensions are evident also in Barth's §45.2 critique of Nietzsche, where he invites the self-serving "I" to recognize itself in the community of sufferers on behalf of whom Christ dies. Here again, I would argue that the problem that troubles Rogers actually resides in §45.3 and its discontinuities with §45.2: I find that this communal dimension is lost in §45.3, when the "Thou" is restricted to the site of the sexually differentiated other and the paradigmatic ethical relationship becomes a heterosexual marriage. I would suggest then that it is specifically in this shift to sexual difference and marriage in particular that Barth surrenders the commitments to which Rogers points.

Here, I am in agreement with Jason Springs, "Gender, Equality, and Freedom in Karl Barth's Theological Anthropology," 447-77. He argues that the orienting norms of mutual recognition and reciprocity in §45.2 importantly qualify and limit the gender-asymmetry intrinsic to Barth's treatment of relationship between man and woman. He finds in §45.2 a social and participatory form of individual agency. He argues that Barth uses I/Thou categories to show that each individual stands apart in their distinctiveness and particularity, for each is simultaneously bound to the other in inter-dependence. He uses these I/Thou categories to expose the enabling effects of the constraints that others reciprocally place on the "I" in mutual recognition (451). He finds this

If the dogmatician is now to say “I am” and to reflect on the significance of this human speech-act, he dare only do this as a confessional response to the self-revealing address of the christological subject who first says “I am.” He must carefully conform his depiction of the self-positing subject to the pattern of activity that Christ exhibits (244). Barth does this by first introducing his readers to a more familiar but distorted pattern of human agency, inviting his readers to recognize themselves in it, before introducing them (along with their bad example) to Christ. We meet the isolated and lonely self, who acts always in service of his own needs, always with the intent of bringing all persons and things into the service of its own ends (229-231). This “I” is preoccupied with “getting even as I give” (230).²¹ It approaches its other with the question

configuration of human responsibility provides the social critic, protestor, visionary or prophet critical leverage with which to resist prevailing consensus. The singularity of “I” and “Thou” resists the reduction or dissolution of individual identity and agency into social relations: they remain concretely particular, embodied, and responsible.

²¹ Of this bad model of agency, Barth writes: ““I am” means that I satisfy myself even in the sense that I have to do justice to myself, that I am pressingly claimed by myself. “I am” means that I stand under the irresistible urge to maintain myself, but also to make something of myself, to develop myself, to try out myself, to exercise and prove myself. “I am” means further, however, that in every development and activity outwards I must and will at all costs maintain and assert myself, not dissipating and losing myself, but concentrating even as I expand, and getting even as I give. It means that I must and will acquire and have personality. But the radius is even wider than this. “I am” means that I may and must live; that I may and must live out my life in the material and spiritual cosmos, enjoying, working, playing, fashioning, possessing, achieving and exercising power; that I may and must in my own place and within my own limits - and who is to say where these are to be drawn?-have my share in the goods of the earth, in the fulness of human knowledge and capacity, in the further development of human technique and art and organisation. These are powerful projections of the “I am” outwards into space and time and its truth and poetry, or rather its poetry and truth, its myth and history. And to these projections there certainly belongs the fashioning of a relationship to what is called “heaven” in the Bible and “God,” “the gods,” or “the divine” elsewhere; the construction of a positive or negative, believing or sceptical, original or conventional position with reference to the ultimate limits and mystery of life, the incomprehensible which will finally confront all our comprehension. And inevitably in this onward progress of the “I am” the encounter with fellow-men will have its own specific and determinative part; the burning questions whether this or that person is important or indifferent to me, whether he attracts or repels me, whether he helps and serves or obstructs and harms me, whether he is superior to me or I can master him and am thus superior to him. To these projections there also belong the dealings with him, with all the selection and rejection, the conflict, peace and renewal of conflict, the constant hide-and-seek, the domination and dependence, the morality and immorality which these dealings inevitably involve and without which life would certainly be much easier and simpler but also much poorer and duller. The only thing is that here too we have a projection of the “I am” outwards. Even the many forms of our fellows are ultimately elements in our own myth or history, not found but invented and decked out by us, and merely speaking the words which we put on their lips. There are merely more or less serviceable or unserviceable figures in our own play, drawn into ourselves to the extent that we have in some way transformed them into something that belongs to us. In their genuine otherness and particularity they are without like the rest of the cosmos. Originally and properly within I am still alone by myself” (230).

of how the other will impact, impinge on or benefit itself (230).²² Nietzsche's *Ecce homo* is Barth's exemplar of all that is sinful in this self-loving self-aggrandizing "I." Refusing to recognize himself in the image of the suffering Christ, this "I am" refuses to see himself as one among the miserable humanity for whom Christ suffers. He rejects Christ's gift along with its ethical imperative to come to the aid of these fellow sufferers. This "I" is in need of the redirecting encounter with the Christ. Christ will point him to the fellowship of the needy neighbors among whom he belongs:

Christianity places before the superman the Crucified, Jesus, as the Neighbour, and in the person of Jesus a whole host of others who are wholly and utterly ignoble and despised in the eyes of the world (of the world of Zarathustra, the true world of men), the hungry and thirsty and naked and sick and captive, a whole ocean of human meanness and painfulness. Nor does it merely place the Crucified and His host before his eyes. It does not merely will that he see Him and them. It wills that he should recognise in them his neighbours and himself. It aims to bring him down from his height, to put him in the ranks which begin with the Crucified, in the midst of His host....Here are his brothers and sisters who belong to him and to whom he belongs. In this Crucified, and therefore in fellowship with this mean and painful host of His people, he has thus to see his salvation, and his true humanity in the fact that he belongs to Him and therefore to them. (241)

The distorted pattern of activity that Barth locates in Nietzsche will reappear later in Barth's account of sexual difference, in the guise of the tyrannical self-asserting male and also in the guise of the modern feminist movement's miming of self-asserting male tyranny. But in the above quote his corrective is the figure of Christ in a host of fellow human sufferers: the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick and captive. Again he surrounds Christ with a picture of human diversity (in its suffering) that he does not reduce to the dyadic opposition of sexual difference, and I will

²² The ethical implications of Barth's account are close to the surface here, along with the indication that Barth has a far wider scope of relationships than those that cross the sexual divide. Barth claims that the previous war has put humanity at a crossroads where political, social and economic contingencies raise the problem of the rights, dignity and sanctity of fellow human beings, and that only an anthropology built on the gracious aid-lending Christ can adequately address these problems. He believes this is the case because the figure of Christ refuses any "hostility, neutrality and antithesis between man and man" (228/273); the burdens and needs of the human other are the object and focus of human agency. The christological "supreme I" that funds his anthropology is the Christ who suffers for the needs of his suffering fellows, and this divine-human gift demands of the beneficiary the recognition of what she or he owes to these same others.

later recall this image along with the others I noted above as a corrective. Barth directs the superman to recognize his own suffering in these figures of suffering, who in turn reflect the suffering of Christ.

Having held up to the superman the mirror of Christ, whose reflection situates the self among a host of fellow human suffers, Barth now delivers a lengthy reflective dramatization of the properly directed human agent—whose orientation toward its Thou is captured in the declaration "I am as Thou art" (248/297). Barth depicts an encounter between two histories, "between two which are dynamic, which move out from themselves, which exist, and which meet or encounter each other in their existence" (248/297). His language echoes his earlier depiction of the self's ecstatic relation to Christ: that movement of history wherein the circular movement of the self's own possibilities is interrupted by the movement of Christ towards it and its corresponding, self-transcending movement toward Christ (158). The inter-human encounter Barth now describes is fully realized only as the subject recognizes the claim that the other imposes on itself, a claim that renders the "I" responsible for the needs of the "thou." Barth inhabits the movement of the "I" toward its "Thou," as it sees its own self-positing, movement, need, and responsibility reflected in the movement, need, and responsibility of the "Thou."²³ I hear the claim of this other as it demands something of me: "It poses questions which must be answered. And there are answers for which it asks." (246). In this other, I recognize someone who is also claimed and affected by myself (247). My movement toward the other is self-revelatory and it requires the self-revelation of the other, for I share with the other the same

²³ Barth writes: "The being and positing of this Thou reaches and affects me... The work of the Thou cannot be indifferent to me, nor can I evade or master it. I cannot do this because as I do my own work, as I art myself and posit myself, I am necessarily claimed by and occupied with the being and positing of the Thou. My own being and positing takes place in and with the fact that I am claimed by that of the other and occupied with it. That of the other sets limits to my own. It indicates its problems. It poses questions which must be answered. And there are answers for which it asks. I am in encounter with the other who is in the same way as I am" (246).

ignorance, having assumptions and misperceptions that can only be corrected with the self-manifesting aid of the other. I owe the same self-manifesting aid to the other. Barth thus patterns this self-revealing aid lending activity after Christ's self-disclosing, salvific incarnational movement toward human kind.

Barth breaks the question-posing, answer-giving meeting of two histories into its constitutive parts, and he secures tasks for the senses as they are put to work in the activity of self-disclosure and the reception of the other's self-disclosure. For the full realization of human fellowship, there must be a mutual seeing, a mutual speaking and hearing, and a mutual aid-lending, and this reciprocal movement must be performed with a glad freedom of the heart.

The eye, as it turns to look the other in the eye, depicts for Barth the receptivity and openness each must have for the other if true fellowship is to take place. If I am to look you in the eye, I must at the same time allow myself to be looked at by you. You cannot be reduced to an object of my knowledge-pursuing endeavors, for only as I open myself to this two-way exchange, giving myself to be known as I move toward a knowledge of you, do I begin to move out of isolation and into fellowship (250-52/299-303). Barth thus secures the vulnerability and dependency of the self upon the counter movement of the other.

The mouth and ears depict for Barth a deeper level of this vulnerable and spontaneous movement toward the other, for it requires "reciprocal expression and its reciprocal reception, reciprocal address and its reciprocal reception" (253). The perceptions and assumptions gained through mere looking are inadequate, because each is to the other "something new and strange and different" (256-7/307). What each requires from and owes to the other is a self-manifesting,

self-interpreting, discursive activity, offered to aid the other in correcting any misperceptions or faulty assumptions and preconceptions (252/302).²⁴

As Barth describes the dispositions with which the agent is to both hear and speak to the other, he subtly patterns this activity after the gratuitous character of Christ's existence: self-manifesting speech is to be delivered as a gift to aid the other; and while this speech will offer a much-needed critical corrective to the other's assumptions it should not be performed as a self-justifying or defensive assertion of oneself on the other.

That I express myself does not mean in the first instance-and from my standpoint it ought not to mean-that I aim to relieve, defend or justify myself against the wrong which I am done or might be done by the picture which the other has of me. My self-expression may later acquire this sense. But this cannot be its primary intention on my part. The real meaning of the fact that I express myself to the other is that I owe him this assistance. Thus my self-expression, if it is genuinely human, has nothing whatever to do with the fear of being misunderstood or the desire to give a better portrait of myself and vindicate myself before him....My word as self-declaration is human only when, in seizing the opportunity of making myself clear and understandable, I have before me the necessary concern of the other not only to see but also to understand me, to escape the uncertainty of the view which he has of me, and the embarrassment caused by this uncertainty. I can help him in this respect only as I tell him who I am, what I think of it, what my view is, with whom and what he has to do in me and my whole being according to the insight gained according to the best of my own knowledge and conscience. I can help him in this way with my word. Only when I speak with him with this purpose in view-not for my own sake but for his-do I express myself honestly and genuinely to him. (254/304)

Barth thus characterizes this self-revelation as a generous rather than self-defensive movement. While defending oneself against misunderstanding or misrecognition should not be what drives the subject's speech, Barth does imagine that the other is very much in need of helpful critical correctives (which might eventually require an element of self-defense), and it is precisely this need that should drive the subject's readiness not only to reveal itself but also to

²⁴ "So long as he is known only by sight, he is compelled to exist for the one who sees him in the picture which he has formed of him. He is no more than what he seems to be in his eyes and according to his standards. He has not been able to do anything to give a different and perhaps better and more truthful representation. With his own self-interpretation he still stands impotently before the interpretation which the other has adopted from mere sight, wondering, no doubt, whether he has any real insight into him at all" (253/302-3).

hear the other in turn.²⁵ The same generosity with which the subject speaks should also be exhibited in hearing the other's speech: a readiness to accept what she or he offers as a gift, rather than a self-interested self-assertion:

He, too, tries to represent himself, inviting me to compare my picture of him with what he himself has to contribute. He, too, aims to help me. For this reason and with this intention he speaks with me. To receive or accept him in this sense is to listen to him. I do not hear him if I assume that he is only concerned about himself, either to commend himself to me or to gain my interest, and that he makes himself conspicuous and understandable, forcing himself and his being upon me, only for this reason. When he speaks to me, I must not be affected by the fact that in innumerable instances in which men express themselves to me this might actually be the case or appear to be so. What matters now is the humanity of my hearing, and this is conditioned negatively by the fact that at least I do not hear this other with suspicion, and positively by the fact that I presuppose that he is trying to come to my help with his self-expression and self-declaration. ... My hearing is human, i.e., I have open ears for the other, only when I listen to him on this presupposition. Only then do I find a place for his self-declaration. (255-6 / 305-6)

This prescription of a generous disposition has a risk-taking aspect, for, as Barth notes, the subject is well-aware that more often than not the other is not worthy of this generous assumption—more often than not, others approach the self with only their own interests in view. It is by way of this generosity that “I” am truly human, truly conformed to the activity of Christ, whose aid-lending help was met by many with rejection and crucifixion. In keeping with this christological connection, Barth stresses the obligation of the self to act, to come to the aid of the other, to not withhold this assistance, even when the other may or does not respond in kind. (257/307):

²⁵ Barth writes: “If I do not accept the fact that my view is incomplete and needs to be supplemented and corrected, that it may indeed be wholly distorted; if I do not suffer from the embarrassment caused by the Thou so long as I have to interpret him from myself and his self-declaration is withheld; if I do not see and deplore the obvious lacuna at this point, there can be no place for the word of the Thou. However loudly it beats against my ear, I cannot hear; my ear is not in any sense a human ear, and I do not take seriously the Thou of the fellow-man unhesitatingly subordinated to myself. To take the Thou seriously and therefore to have a human ear is to move towards the self-declaration of the other and to welcome it as an event which for my own sake must take place between him and me. It is necessary for me that the other should represent and display himself to me no matter what this may involve or entail. I am not a true I and do not genuinely exist without him. I am only an empty subject if I do not escape that difficulty in relation to him. ... Hearing on this presupposition is human hearing of the self-expression of the fellow-man” (255-6 / 305-6).

Why I cannot be silent but am required to speak is that I necessarily abandon him and leave him to his own devices if I spare myself what is perhaps the thankless venture, and him the unwelcome penetration of his sphere, and withhold from him that which he definitely ought to know, but cannot know until I tell him....No matter what the results, I cannot refrain from knocking. The humanity of the encounter between I and Thou demands that I should not merely make a few tentative efforts in this direction, but do my utmost. Speaking on this presupposition, not for one's own sake but for that of the needy other, is human speaking. (257/307)

These parallels to Christ's gratuitous activity are deepened when Barth explains the purpose for this mutual seeing, speaking and hearing—all is done to summon the other to come to the self's aid, and to hear the same summons from the other (260/312).²⁶ I am not to leave you alone with the anxiety and burdens that you bare, for I must be present to lend support and help (262-3). In turn I must not, with a delusional self-sufficiency, attempt to carry my own anxieties and burdens alone, but I must instead summon and receiving support from you: we must let ourselves be helped by others as readily as we leap to lend aid to them (263).

This movement toward the other is, finally, to be performed with a gladness of heart that discovers in the other what it has always sought and needed. Barth here captures the disposition proper to the agential embrace of the divine gift mediated through the human other:

I have waited for Thee. I sought Thee before Thou didst encounter me. I had Thee in view even before I knew Thee. The encounter with Thee is not, therefore, the encounter with something strange which disturbs me, but with a counterpart which I have lacked and without which I would be empty and futile. (269)

²⁶ Barth writes: "If the man Jesus, even though He is Himself, is for us in the strictest sense, living for us, accepting responsibility for us, in this respect, acting as the Son of God in the power of the Creator, He differs from us. This is His prerogative, and no other man can be compared with Him. Correspondence to His being and action consists in the more limited fact that we render mutual assistance. This correspondence is, of course, necessary. Measured by the man Jesus, humanity cannot be less than this for any of us. If our action is human, this means that it is an action in which we give and receive assistance. An action in which assistance is either withheld or rejected is inhuman. For either way it means isolation and persistence in isolation" (261-2).

We might recall at this point Adam's failed search and eventual glad recognition of Eve in §41. This glad embrace of the "Thou" expresses the same features of human freedom that Adam performed for Barth: I joyfully elect and affirm the only option God has chosen for me (272).²⁷

THE SEXUALLY DIFFERENTIATED OTHER (§45.3)

Sexual Difference and its Order

Having described the subject's encounter with the human other in broad enough terms to embrace all forms and modes of inter-human encounter, in §45.3 Barth declares that this fellowship finds the occasion for its fullest realization and performance in the interaction between the sexes. It is most fully actualized in a lifelong monogamous marital relationship, wherein the free decision for fellowship with the other has the sort of exclusive longevity and commitment that reflects Christ's unwavering election of his community (288/347-8).²⁸

Why should a relationship between two of the opposite sexes afford this opportunity? Might not a variety of other inter-human relationships afford the same? In the distinction between the sexes Barth finds an alterity that is analogous to the distinction between the

²⁷ "There is also an electing and election. Each can affirm the other as the being with which he wants to be and cannot be without. But this leads to mutual joy, each in the existence of the other and both in the fact that they can exist together. For in these circumstances even the co-existence is joy. The fact remains that common existence is still something posited and given, but this givenness is now clear and vital in an active willing of this fellowship, a willing which derives quite simply from the fact that each has received a gift which he necessarily desires to reciprocate to the best of his ability. And if it is asked in what this gift consists, the answer must be that the one has quite simply been given the other, and that what he for his part has to give is again himself. It is in this being given and giving that there consists the electing and election, the mutual acceptance, the common joy, and therefore the freedom of this encounter-the freedom in which there is no room for those misunderstandings, in which both can breathe as they let breathe, in which both keep their distance because they are so close, and are so close because they can keep their distance. But what else is the discovery but the discovery how great and unfathomable and inexpressible is the secret that this may be so" (272).

²⁸ "There can be no question that man is to woman and woman to man supremely the other, the fellow-man, to see and to be seen by whom, to speak with and to listen to whom, to receive from and to render assistance to whom is necessarily a supreme human need and problem and fulfilment, so that whatever may take place between man and man and woman and woman is only as it were a preliminary and accompaniment for this true encounter between man and fellowman, for this true being in fellow-humanity" (288/347).

incarnate Christ and his community of fellows (now conceived as a simple collective). Between males and females Barth identifies “the only structural differentiation” (*die einzige strukturelle Differenzierung*) in which humans exists (286/344), one that persists through every other difference that we might draw between groups of human beings, and it expresses itself within these other differences (age, class, ethnicity, etc).²⁹ Furthermore, he speaks of the possibility of an attraction between this polarity unparalleled across other sites of difference precisely because their alterity cuts so deeply:

the antitheses between man and man are so great and estranging and yet stimulating that the encounter between them carries with it the possibility of a supreme difficulty otherwise absent, and yet in all these antitheses their relatedness, their power of mutual attraction and their reciprocal reference the one to the other are so great and illuminating and imperative that the possibility also emerges at least of a supreme interest otherwise absent. (288/347)

So central is the relationship between the sexes, Barth is sure that no one can be fully human without participating in some capacity in this encounter with the opposite sex. The likes of Nietzsche and Goethe are Barth’s philosophical foils here, with their desire to emancipate themselves from any dependence on women, a fault of which Barth suspects monks in their cloisters may also be guilty (290). But with respect to this point he makes no mention of the unmarried Christ in his close circle of twelve men, for with the introduction of sexual difference he genders all Christ’s others as a singular feminine collective. Barth does not attempt to describe what the difference between the sexes entails, that it should acquire such a status and exemplify an antithesis analogous to that which divides the incarnate Christ from his company of fellows, nor does he make explicit what he has in mind about the attraction existing between men and women. He simply assumes the obvious givennes of this antithesis between the sexes.

²⁹ “The so-called races of mankind [*Menschenrassen*] are only variations of one and the same structure, allowing at any time the practical intermingling of the one with the other and consisting only in fleeting transitions from the one to the other, so that they cannot be fixed and differentiated with any precision but only very approximately, and certainly cannot be compared with the distinct species and subspecies of the animal kingdom” (286/344-5).

Barth now imposes order (along with sexual difference) retrospectively on the “I” and its “Thou” of §45.2. The male subject retains an agential precedence over the female that grants him a heavier stake in imitating the pattern of Christ’s activity for and on behalf of his community. Here again Barth is reticent on details, declining to explain how the exchange of §45.2 is to be successfully performed if only one party is to fully appropriate his model of human agency, in its gratuitous self-risking movement toward the other. He asserts both the difference and its ordering in the most general of terms:

It cannot be contested that both physiologically and biblically a certain strength and corresponding precedence are a very general characteristic of man, and a weakness and corresponding subsequence of woman. But in what the strength (*Stärke*) and precedence (*Vorangehen*) consists on the one side, and the weakness (*Schwäche*) and subsequence (*Nachfolge*) on the other, what it means that man is the head of woman and not vice versa, is something which is better left unresolved in a general statement, and value-judgments must certainly be resisted....What distinguishes man from woman and woman from man even in this relationship of super- and subordination is more easily discovered, perceived, respected and valued in the encounter between them than it is defined. It is to be constantly experienced in their mutual exchanges and co-existence. (287/346-7)

Barth’s (uncharacteristic) loss of words on the specifics of sexual difference and its ordering is a matter I will return to in my final chapter’s discussion of Barth’s ethic of sexual difference. Both there and in §45.3 Barth construes sexual difference as a given distinction persisting and manifesting itself in ever-changing cultural mores, social customs and practices, all of which concretize and express an alterity not reducible to any of these features (309-12). He consistently avoids evoking biological, reproductive, psychological, or sociological discourses for depicting the difference. His assertions express assumptions he does not anticipate his readers will contest. He thus depends on unexamined social conventions and assumptions to do the heavy lifting. To say any more of this difference and its order would risk the legitimization of a natural theology—the confusion of the divine order with human orders. He does not consider that the very

assumption of a deeply pervasive difference and antithesis between the sexes might itself be just as culturally conditioned as efforts to give it descriptive flesh.

Scriptural Manifestations of the Difference and its Order

Rather than appealing to psychology, sociology, or philosophical typologies to support his assertions about sexual difference, Barth performs his familiar dogmatic task of discovering the givenness of this privileged alterity in the Scriptures. He repeats the inter-testamental interpretative work he undertook in his III/1. Linking Genesis 2, Song of Songs and Ephesian 5, he argues that the fellowship and special dignity of the relationship between the sexes lies in “the freedom of the heart for the other,” and not in fatherhood, motherhood or the establishment of family (293). In the context of the Old Testament, Genesis 2, and the Songs give a marginalized view of the dignity of the relationship between the sexes. In the Old Testament, Barth argues, messianic anticipation drives the dominant tendency to define the relationship between the sexes (and marriage in particular) in terms of sexual reproduction and patrilineage. With the advent of the long-awaited Messiah-Son, sexual reproduction and patrilineage fall to the sideline in the New Testament picture of human fellowship. Marriage is now understood as the free decision and love for a member of the opposite sex—an act that is to signify the love of Christ for his church (Eph. 5) (291-301). Why does the unmarried state of the long-awaited Messiah *not* have the same effect on marriage itself that his advent as son of Adam, Abraham and David has on sexual reproduction? In this inter-testamental meta-narrative, would not marriage tread the same path as the patrilineage to which it has been so closely tethered? We will not get an answer to these questions, and we will have to wait until III/4 to hear Barth attempt to incorporate Christ’s

unmarried state and those texts where both Paul and Christ both privilege celibacy over marriage into his heteronormative framework for human fellowship.

In order to adhere to his methodological commitment of building anthropology on christology, Barth must secure an unmarried Christ as the governing criterion for the central role he gives to marriage. He does so by appealing to (the unmarried) Paul's fondness for marital metaphors, and above all to Ephesian 5 where Christ finds his bride in the Church. Barth does this in a long section of fine print, where he expands the list of Pauline texts that he used in his earlier III/1 discussion of sexual difference.

I Corinthians 11 and Ephesians 5 retain the central place in this list (301-16/363-381). Interpreting this set of texts, Barth argues that Paul uses marriage to shed light on the relationship between Christ and the Church, and he uses the relationship of Christ and the Church to shed light on what the marital relationship ought to be. Barth finds in these scriptures a depiction of marriage as an agential exercise in freely choosing the only choice given to you by God: to freely be and enact the sexed person that you are, and to do so by directing your activity of aid-giving/aid-receiving toward the opposite sex. Barth thus rediscovers here the same model of agency that Adam performed so effectively for him in Genesis 2.³⁰

³⁰ Barth does actually note the texts where Paul treats celibacy (I Cor. 7:1-10; 7:25-40; 7:10-17; 14:33-38; 2:8-12), but rather than discussing or accounting for them he simply dismisses their relevance to the question at hand (i.e. Paul's treatment of marriage) (309/373), and he makes no mention of Christ's unmarried state. His Pauline list of marital texts privilege Eph. 5 and I Cor. 11, which I discuss above. In addition to these, Barth also draws on Rom 7:16, I Cor. 6:12-20, 2 Cor. 11:2f. In his reading of I Cor. 6:12-20, it is especially clear that Barth is not attempting to align a grid of hierarchically ordered binaries in order to support woman's subordinate status, but instead articulating an account of human freedom. Here Paul juxtaposes the relationship of a man to a harlot with the relationship of a man to Christ, such that the harlot and Christ occupy parallel positions in relation to the human agent in view. Barth's interpretation of this passage focuses on the freedom of that agent to choose the one thing given to him. His use of a woman purely as an occasion to satisfy his sexual needs is discontinuous with and does not reflect his freed decision to choose Christ (305/368): "That the Christian is one body with his wife can take place only in correspondence with the fact that he himself is one spirit with the Lord. But in the kind of sexual intercourse referred to there is no such correspondence and therefore it is impossible.... Belonging to a woman, he cannot contradict but must correspond to the fact that he belongs to Christ. But he would contradict this if he belonged to a harlot and became one body with her" (306-7). He continues: "What is intrinsically possible to the man who is one spirit with Christ in the relationship of man and woman and therefore in the completion of this relationship can only

Most importantly, Paul's Ephesians 5 metaphor of a bridal church enables (perhaps requires) Barth to side-step the question of Christ's sexual identity, practices, and relationships with women, but with the peculiar side-effect of untethering his discussion of marriage and sexual difference from a christological mooring in Christ's own human identity, body, and practices (296-299/358-360). Barth's silence regarding the sexual identity and celibacy of Christ thus deepens the ambiguity shrouding his reference to an antithesis between the sexes. In view of Barth's refusal to naturalize the difference and his avoidance of biological, psychological, philosophical, or sociological discourses to give it flesh, the critic is left wondering what this difference entails that would justify the central role Barth wants to give it in his theological anthropology. Of course, Barth avoids any recourse to these discourses because he wants to avoid a natural theology that secures its anthropology on anything other than christological grounds. Yet because his christology of III/2 has nothing to offer with respect to sexual identity as such (let us recall that "impenetrable veil of silence [that] lies over the fact that He was a male" and celibate [329]), Barth must rely on the assumptions that drive contemporaneous efforts to distinguish the sexes through the categories of biology, psychology, sociology and philosophy. Might not this veil of silence invite us instead to critique the centrality that such discourses would give to this difference?

In his interpretation of Ephesians 5:22-23, Barth presents the order between the sexes (with husband and wife at the normative center) as a copy modeled on the pattern of Christ's relationship to the Church, and as such one that follows the ordered pattern of Adam's recognition and naming of Eve in Genesis 2 (314). It is specifically the agential initiative of the eternally electing Christ (and Adam, his pre-figuration) that husbands are to imitate:

be, as an exercise of his freedom and therefore his participation in the lordship of Christ, and in his obedience to "the law of the Spirit of life," the intercourse which beyond all need and its satisfaction is the completion of the encounter of man and fellow-man and the fulfilment of full and serious and genuine fellowship" (308).

as the love of Christ precedes the answering love of the community, so the love of the husband precedes that of the wife. In imitation of the attitude of Christ the husband may and should precede at this point as the wife may and should precede him in representing the community in its absolute subordination to Christ. ...They may and should and must precede women by accepting and affirming them in such a way that they do what man did at the climax of his creation in Gen. 2. (314)

Order now renders the agent of §45.2 paradigmatically male (just as it did Genesis 2). The spontaneous self-risking movement toward the other, the imitation of Christ himself, is to be appropriated by the male.

If Barth is convinced that this male prerogative “does not give one control over the other, or put anyone under the dominion of the other,” (313) it is because he is confident that the pattern of Christ’s electing, self-giving incarnational descent on behalf of the needs of his creatures undermines any place for self-serving dominion, command-giving, and control. All is to be done with the needs of the other in-view. But Barth neglects to consider what is left to female agency now that his model agent is unveiled as a male prerogative. Why should he trouble himself with such a question if it is his task to attempt to enact the agential reticence that is here implied for woman? If she is not to imitate Christ in this respect, what other mode of agency does Barth leave to her? The image of the silent motionless Eve is the narrative template for the place of women in the order of the sexes. It is her restraint that enables the male to assume the prerogative of playing Christ—a peculiar requirement in such an actualistic ontology with its agent always in motion.

Between §45.2’s discussion of a mutual exchange and §45.3’s discussion of order we find two irreconcilable accounts of human agency, parallel to the discontinuity between the speaking Bride of the Songs and the silent Eve. The disconnection between §45.2 and §45.3 is exacerbated by the fact that Barth makes no attempt to articulate §45.3’s order using the language and framework of mutual seeing, hearing, speaking and aid-lending that fleshed out his

earlier depiction of the movement of I toward Thou. He does not tell us how a relationship that begins with two people (necessarily simultaneously) looking each other in the eye can have a first actor or initiator. Nor does he tell us how the male is to be at once both the first to speak (revealing himself to the other) and first to hear the self-revelation of that other. His depiction of order is as loosely tethered to his model human agent of §45.2 as his depiction of sexual difference is to his depiction of Christ in §45.1.

Barth's interpretation of I Corinthians 11:1-6 betrays his awareness of the criticism that these two sets of claims about the relationship between the sexes are irreconcilable (309-12/372-377). As Barth reads him, Paul here requires the women of Corinth to wear veils in order to signify their difference from and subordination to the men in the church. As I noted in Chapter 2, Barth was confronted some years earlier by the feminist argument that used Galatians 3:28 to counter the ordering of I Corinthians 11 and to contest the privileged place granted men in church.³¹ His exposition of I Corinthians 11 indicates that he still has this challenge in mind. Here he evades the dogmatic task of reconciling his two seemingly contrary claims about the status of women by discovering them asserted by Paul in two different epistles. Galatians 3:28 ("There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus") speaks of the mutuality of the relationship, while I Corinthians 11 supports its ordering. Barth writes:

An enthusiastic attempt was being made to introduce equality where previously the custom had been both at Corinth and in other Christian communities that in their gatherings for worship the men should be uncovered and the women covered. We may well imagine that Gal. 3²⁸ ("neither male nor female") provided either verbally or materially the main argument in favour of abolishing this outward distinction and therefore against Paul, who had given this dictum but now favoured the keeping of the tradition (v. 2)...Yet only an inattentive enthusiasm could deduce from this that man and woman are absolutely alike, that there can be no question of super-and subordination

³¹ Gary Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology*, 165-6, 227 fn. 122, 123.

between them, and that it is both legitimate and obligatory to abolish the distinction between the uncovered and the covered head in divine service. (309-10)

Paul's voice now serves as the vehicle in which Barth deflects the arguments and claims of his contemporary feminists, who would find egalitarian implications in Galatians 3:28 to contradict any privileged position secured for men. If Paul sees no contradiction between the mutuality to which Galatians 3 gestures and the female subordination of I Corinthians 11, then Barth need not trouble himself with reconciling his own assertions:

It is the life of this new creature which Paul describes with the saying that the head of the woman is the man. Gal. 3²⁸ is still valid, in spite of shortsighted exegetes, like the Corinthians themselves, who shake their heads and think they can claim a contradiction. The mutuality of the relationship still obtains, as described. (312)

Barth continues, "It is only in the world of the old aeon that the feminist question can arise" (312).

Barth's contemporary feminists will not find him practicing that generous hearing he prescribed for his readers in §45.2. He will not allow their voices to put his own assumptions and interpretive framework into question, let alone address their challenge directly. Paul must stand in for him. He thus performs the privileged place his order of §45.3 has afforded him: he sets the terms of the exchange and the place of each partner in it, and he curtly dismisses any questions, objections or counter-arguments that female critics might raise on the matter. Like Adam, he does not need to hear and be unsettled and corrected by the voice of his female other in order to name her and speak for and on her behalf. The ethical obligation of the "I" that Barth describes in §45.2, demands much more of him than he here gives. His own performance here speaks further to the difficulty he has in reconciling the mutuality of §45.2 with the order of §45.3.

CONCLUSION

Barth's theological anthropology provides a more fully developed picture of that human agent that I identified in §18 and §41. I have followed this agent as it comes first to know itself as a response to the gratuitous, revelatory and saving address of Christ, and then as it plays Christ in lending aid to its neighbor, from whom it must seek the same help. I have continued to foreground the ways in which Barth carefully patterns his human agent after his christological agent. Barth sets his human agent in motion, on the way to a fresh encounter with God's address in Christ, and on the way toward its human others. The properly oriented and moving agent is open to the interruption and critical corrections imposed on it by these divine and human others. It must reconfigure its interpretive framework in order to accommodate the self-revealing imposition of the other, and it is to offer this same self-revealing, corrective aid to the other.

In following this human agent, my intent has been to expose the distorting effects of Barth's intransigent sexism and heterosexism on his construal of human agency. I have used the christological moorings of this pattern of activity to trouble Barth's account of sexual difference and its ordering, and to highlight its tenuous attachment to the supreme christological "I," on whom Barth's gaze is always fixed and in whom he instructs all to see themselves indirectly reflected.

I have exposed the trouble Barth has in providing a coherent picture of women's agency. He wants them to do all that the agent of §45.2 does. Yet he wants them to restrain this "doing" in order to secure the male prerogative to play Christ to them. His ordering eviscerates the agency of women by setting constraints on what otherwise is an agent-always-in motion, seeking, speaking and hearing the other. As in his reading of Genesis 2, when he introduces order into the relationship between the sexes, his model agent becomes paradigmatically male. In

spite of Barth's best efforts to secure the full humanity of woman, woman turns out to be man minus his most important attribute—his ethical impulse. But if she *is* to do all that Barth's model agent does, this talk of ordering becomes unintelligible in the conceptual framework that Barth uses to describe his agent in §45.2. If she is to play the "I" of §45.2, then her self-revealing move toward the other might include the critical correction of and resistance to precisely such efforts to restrain and control her. In this sense, Barth's account of agency in §45.2 can be mobilized to expose and correct some of the most problematic aspects of his depiction of women.

With regard to sexual difference, I have aimed to show that this particular difference does not permeate Barth's depiction of human agency. It is not in play in Barth's reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan (§18); it is not in play in his depiction of Christ's relationship to his fellows (§45.1); nor is it in play in his construal of the "I" (§45.2). Whenever Barth describes the relationship between the sexes, he imports his pattern of agency into a heteronormative framework, wherein the agent most fully performs its part in a relationship to one member of the opposite sex. This restrictive, dyadic, and oppositional construal is at odds with the agent of §45.2, who is summoned to recognize his place among a company of fellow sufferers. It is also at odds with Christ, whose saving activity is directed to this diverse host of needy people. Sexual difference cuts a dividing line into this community of the suffering beneficiaries of Christ's grace.

I have aimed to decenter this particular difference (to which Barth devotes little descriptive attention) using his more robustly-developed depictions of christological and human agency. First, I have shown that this dividing line rests on an unsupported and unexplained appeal to the self-evident alterity between the sexes. Rather than sinking this difference into every feature of his theological anthropology, Barth simply tacks it on after his rich picture of the

human agency in §45.2, and he makes no efforts to integrate sexual difference and its ordering into that picture.³² He relies on his reader's assumptions to do that heavy lifting for him. Second, I have shown that Barth tethers sexual difference very loosely to Jesus Christ, because he does not consider Jesus's male identity or his actual relationships with women to be significant for the christological grounding of his theological anthropology. The Ephesians 5 bridal metaphor must supply the wife Christ never had, with the consequence of further exposing the disconnection of sexual difference from the life that Christ lived among human beings, and further mystifying the nature of that difference.

I have drawn attention to Barth's use (in §45.2) of the Gospels' non-marital images to depict Christ's relationship to other human beings. If his reliance on the Gospels' image of Christ

³² As I noted in the notes of Ch. 2, Suzanne Selinger argues that there is an interweaving and cross fertilizing of ideas between Barth and his assistant, Charlotte von Kirschbaum, regarding sexual difference and relationship between the sexes. They shared overarching agreement with only minor divergences. Selinger notes von Kirschbaum's dependency on Barth's biblical exegesis and her appropriation of and reliance on Barth's writings in her published lectures, and she notes subtleties and divergences, none of which amount to significant departures with respect to the problems I am exposing in their account. Selinger observes that in the few writings we have of von Kirschbaum she makes the discussion of sexual difference, its ordering, and its centrality in relation to the imago Dei central to her theological writing, whereas by contrast Barth's discussion of sexual difference and its ordering is insulated from the rest of his writing (*Charlotte von Kirschbaum*, 177). In exposing the tenuous connection between Barth's discussion of sexual difference and the preceding pages of III/2, my argument supports this particular claim. Selinger's work might offer a further clue as to why Barth's account of sexual difference is so poorly integrated into his theological anthropology, in spite of its pretensions to expose the heart of a human existence—its very affinity with the imago Dei. Carefully tracking both von Kirschbaum's and Barth's evolving views on the imago Dei and the difference and relationship between the sexes, Selinger argues that Barth's account was worked through a long-term collaboration with von Kirschbaum. She ventures that the idea of connecting the relationship between the sexes to the imago Dei may have been von Kirschbaum's, and she argues that his account of sexual difference developed in close collaboration with von Kirschbaum's thinking on the topic—a long term preoccupation for von Kirschbaum, but not for Barth. If Selinger is correct, then this might help to explain why Barth will claim that the relationship between the sexes is the central human relationship and yet his §45.3 discussion is so readily detachable from what precedes, so minimally developed, and so poorly integrated with it. It would explain also why Barth can give us figures of Jesus's relationship to others, and of human agency itself, that do not require or even refer to the importance of the opposite sex. By contrast, von Kirschbaum's lectures on women (*The Question of Woman*) show her to be thoroughly preoccupied with the question of the relationship between women and men and their roles in family life and church. She is engrossed by the issue of women's subordination and what it means for their relationship to men and their vocations within the church. If Selinger's assessment regarding the influence of von Kirschbaum is correct, then this would also explain why literature that begins by focusing on Barth's interpretation of the imago Dei in III/1 leads to a distorting interpretation of the rest of his theology and human agency. If Barth's construal of centrality and ordering of the relationship between the sexes is not as central to or carefully integrated within his theological anthropology as his discussion of sexual difference would require it to be, then it is not surprising that the use of this ordering would lead to problematic interpretations of his doctrines of the Trinity and christology.

(at the center of an ever-widening circle of fellows) is allowed to overshadow Paul's fondness for bridal metaphors, we have a more sustainable christological framing for inter-human alterity than the one Barth attempts to secure in §45.3. Barth's depiction of Christ's location among this diverse circle of human beings does not lend itself readily to the heteronormative constraints of §45.3, which require him to settle down with a single metaphorical wife. Instead it suggests a framework in which multiple sites of alterity might provide occasions for the agent to seek and find its neighbors. In such a framework, sexual difference might then acquire the secondary and fluid status that Barth gives to other differences (race, class, age, etc.).

In my final chapter I will continue to develop these themes as I further explore the function of sexual difference and its order in the special ethics of §54. Barth will have more to say on these topics and will give me more with which to work.

CHAPTER FIVE

AN ETHIC FOR THE SEXUALLY DIFFERENTIATED SELF

Barth's final extended discussion of sexual difference, *Church Dogmatics* III/4, §54 ("Freedom in Fellowship"), belongs to the part-volume that develops the ethics of the Doctrine of Creation.¹ In this particular paragraph Barth develops an ethic for the orderly performance of one's sex. It is located within a broader discussion of the divine command that directs the self toward other human beings. He divides his discussion of the full spectrum of possible human relationships into three spheres: the relationship between "man and woman" (§54.1 "*Mann und Frau*"), "parents and children" (§54.2 "*Eltern und Kinder*"), and "near and distant neighbours" (§54.3 "*Die Nahen und Die Fernen*"). Here he makes explicit what was implicit in §45.3: sexual difference (and with it the relation between the sexes) is the gift of the creator, and, as such it imposes obligations that the agent is to perform in obedience to the divine command. He develops three guidelines for the direction this performance must take: 1) one must persistently embrace and perform one's sexual specificity (as either male or female); 2) one must orient one's performance toward fellowship with the opposite sex, in the sort of intersubjective exchange he described in §45.2; 3) this fellowship must follow an order in which men lead, initiate, and assume responsibility for their shared life and fellowship with women (the sort of order we saw in §45.3). Barth's discussion is not limited to marriage but aims to embrace every level at which the sexes relate to each other, but marriage remains the normative center in which these three

¹ In this chapter, quotations and references to *Church Dogmatics* III/4 are cited in the body of the main text, without reference to volume and part-volume. When referring to other part-volumes, volume number and part-volume number will precede the page number. The first page number refers to the English translation of *Church Dogmatics*. When I refer to the German original, a second page number is positioned after a forward slash.

aspects are most fully realizable. Barth will finally acknowledge and attempt to integrate Christ's unmarried status into his heteronormative framework for human fellowship.

In this chapter I continue to interrogate and unsettle the place that sexual difference occupies in the regulation and ordering of inter-human fellowship. Barth continues to assert that sexual difference is the structural divider of humankind, one that eludes reduction to biological, sociological, philosophical, or psychological discourses. He will talk of how this difference manifests in constantly changing cultural norms, mores, and conventions. We will see that while sexual difference is imposed on the agent as a command of God that directs each agent to a faithful enactment of his or her own sex, that command is not reducible to any of the customs, conventions, or social norms through which it is to be performed. For this reason Barth calls for a critical relationship to the norms, customs, and social mores through which the difference is expressed and the command of God obeyed. At the same time, however, he calls for a performance that carefully polices, maintains, and honors the boundary between the sexes by way of those same conventions. I will suggest that this critical relationship to cultural norms opens up space within Barth's heteronormative framework for performances that unsettle, subvert, and transgress the reputedly unambiguous dividing line between the sexes which these norms instantiate.

Here in §54, the celibate Christ finally appears on the boundary of Barth's heteronormative framework, as a paradoxical performance of the marital norm. Christ's location further exposes the susceptibility of Barth's man-woman binary to this sort of subversive performance. I will suggest that if we move Christ from the margins of inter-human fellowship, where Barth has consigned him in §54.1, back to the center he occupied in §45.1, before Barth introduced sexual difference, then sexual difference itself loses its supreme status as the primary

site of inter-human alterity. It falls in place alongside other more fluid differences (race, class, age, etc).

This chapter continues my interrogation of Barth's ordering between the sexes by exposing the incongruity between his two central claims regarding women: 1) that women are fully functioning ethical agents, and 2) that they must restrain their ethical activity in deference to that of men. Barth imagines woman as a fully functioning agent, one who speaks her sexed specificity to her male "other" as a self-revealing corrective to his misperceptions of and presumptions about her. Yet at the same time she must restrain herself in this activity lest she transgress man's prerogative to initiate and maintain the relationship between the sexes. We will see that this prerogative requires that he oversee the communion and the critical interaction between the sexes as that interaction instantiates the distinction.

BARTH'S COMMAND ETHICS

The rehearsal of some key features of Barth's command ethics will help orient my analysis of Barth's three guidelines for the maintenance of sexual difference and its ordering.² Barth incorporates ethics into dogmatics, and dogmatics into ethics, subjecting each to the same methodological restraints, rather than treating them as independent inquiries. His moral theology, like his dogmatic exposition, is a discourse that he performs as a would-be response to the divine address. The address must be heard again and again in socio-historically specific contexts, and it

² My reading of §54 benefits from a number of recent books on Barth's special ethics, in particular Gerald McKenny, *Analogy of Grace*, Paul T. Nimmo, *Being in Action*, William Werpehowski, *Karl Barth and Christian Ethics*, as well as John Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, and Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology*. While, these books do not undertake a close analysis of the man-woman relationship of §54, they have shaped my understanding of the place and function of Barth's account within his special ethics. McKenny's book has been an especially helpful resource in my description of Barth's special ethics, and I find that the analogy he continually draws between human ethical activity and God's gracious activity resonates with my own interest in tracking the ways in which the relationship between the sexes (and particular the ethical impulse of §45.2) is to conform itself to Christ's gracious movement toward the other.

comes always as a revelatory gift that imposes an obligation. Barth's concern with divesting the human agent of any self-assured mastery over knowledge of God (and thus of itself) now undermines the agent's imagined mastery over the good and presumed capacity to neutrally distinguish right from wrong. This divestment shaped Barth's earlier construal of Adam's freedom in III/1.³ Barth's agent is constituted as answerable to a divine command imposed from without, a command that is tailored to the highly specific contexts in which the agent finds itself, a command that distinguishes the good; the agent has only to assent and conform him or herself gladly to this command (as Adam did in his recognition and naming of Eve).⁴

Scriptures play an authoritative and normative role for Barth's ethics as they do also for his dogmatics, and so his biblical exposition undertaken in §41 and §45 underwrites his present discussion of sexual difference. However, as Barth makes clear in his doctrine of revelation, scriptures are not identical with the Word's address to human beings, for the Word is irreducible to the contextual, concrete and culturally specific media in which it is veiled and through which it is heard. Accordingly, Barth refuses to identify the various biblical prescriptions and legal codes (i.e. the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount) with the divine command to which the agent is to conform him or herself. However, these texts do provide the normative resources with which Barth guides his readers' moral reflection, just as they provide criteria for his ongoing, dogmatic critical and constructive engagement with the Reformed tradition. Barth objects to a casuistry that treats the command of God as a set of general laws (whether biblical laws, natural laws, traditional precepts), thereby fixing the command in a legal text that the

³ For an analysis of the ethical undercurrent in Barth's reading of Gen. 2 see McKenny, *Analogy of Grace*, 96-106. His reading resonates with my own in Ch. 3, however he does not address the gender dynamics that arise with the arrival of Eve.

⁴ For a helpful description of the relationship between ethics and dogmatics, see *ibid.*, 122-65, and Nimmo, *Being in Action*, 41-62.

human agent must then interpret and apply or make specific to a particular occasion, context or question. The divine command is not a general norm upon which the human agent makes a judgment by applying it; rather the command of God comes to particular people and individuals already fully specified to address a particular context and occasion, confronting them with the choice of whether or not they will conform themselves to it. As Gerald McKenny puts it, the command of God is both the norm and its specification; it is both the law and the judge who applies it.⁵

If Barth refuses to identify the divine command with legal codes of the sort we find in the Decalogue, he does identify it with numerous biblical instances of highly specific orders and directions concerning particular deeds, performances, and modes of conduct given by God to Israel, by Jesus to his disciples, by the Holy Spirit through the apostles (i.e. by Paul to the women of Corinth). As it came to these particular peoples fully specified, so Barth wants to train his readers to seek and expect to hear it come fully specified to them—addressing the specific circumstances in which they make decisions about how to act; to constantly position themselves as answerable to a decision and judgment already made by God regarding good and evil; to persistently seek to discern and recognize the command in each moment of decision. They are to question whether their every decision and action corresponds to and thus obeys the divine decision regarding the good in that moment. In this way they are to subject their judgment to the divine judgment regarding them.

⁵ McKenny, *Analogy of Grace*, 239. For a discussion of the relationship of the divine command to scripture, and of Barth's reservations regarding casuistry and his practical use of it in providing ethical instruction see *ibid.*, 57-61, 238-274; see also Werpehowski, *Karl Barth and Christian Ethics*, 15-6, 23-32, 37-55, 57-69, and Nimmo, *Being in Action*, 17-40, 41-61, 83-4.

The ethicist's access to the command of God is subjected to the same epistemological constraints as is the dogmatician: the command is always mediated in creaturely mediums. It is not immediately transparent. It therefore cannot be confidentially possessed and wielded against others. Thus a persistent practice of ethical deliberation and reflection is required of all agents, wherein they examine and test their own conduct and test the possibilities before them in a process that culminates in a decision, but one made and acted on with the awareness that this activity is answerable to God's examination, judgment, mercy, and forgiveness.

In III/4 Barth offers a moral pedagogy aimed at instructing and guiding his readers' own ethical reflection. Accordingly, we will see that if Barth does not expect his female readers to wear a veil because Paul told his (quasi-feminist egalitarian) readers to do so, neither does Barth want to specify what the command of God is to the women of his own day with regard to dress and comportment. He wants instead to set his readers on a path of inquiry into what the command of God is for them, and thus on a deliberative and critical path in relation to external biblical norms and customs, and to contemporary social norms and customs, and in the process to discern the command of God as it comes specified with respect to the decisions they must make. Toward these ends he offers some guidelines, developed out of his previous exegetical and dogmatic work on sexual difference, that aim to delineate the broad parameters within which they can expect the command of God to be heard.⁶

⁶ See McKenny, *Analogy of Grace*, 229-66 for a discussion of ethical reflection and the ethicist's role in offering ethical instruction. McKenny argues for the importance of distinguishing ethical reflection from ethical instruction. Barth's moral theology, as we find it in III/4, is ethical instruction, and it functions as the first stage of ethical reflection, insofar as it aims to prepare and guide the reader's own ethical deliberation; yet it does not take the place of that deliberation that seeks to discern the specified command of God. Barth offers his readers moral guidance, yet he wants to avoid deciding right action for them in advance of their own ethical reflection; his aim is to prepare them for an encounter with the divine decision, to encourage and equip them with resources to go toward this event (ibid., 238, fn. 35; 262-4). Barth's instructions regarding birth control and the decision-making involved in the question of

Barth's three general guidelines in §54.1 are aimed to orient his readers' efforts to discern and perform the will of God for their sexually distinctive existence by way of culturally contingent mores and customs. The methodological commitments I have just described have much to do with Barth's reticence on providing details for what sexual difference and its order entail and how it ought to be performed. However I shall question whether Barth's own methodological constraints are sufficient to excuse him from providing descriptive explanation for his ordering of the sexes and for his identification of sexual difference as *the* site of inter-human alterity that gives witness to the relationship of Christ to his community. He will continue to prove himself far readier to supply descriptive detail regarding other significant distinctions, not least of which is the distinction between creatures and their Creator, for which he has no shortage of words. His reticence on the nature of sexual difference will give the impression that this difference is a less speakable mystery than that which demarcates the human from the divine. His loss of words betrays the difficulty he has in securing the givenness of this alterity and its order under the constraints of his own methodological and dogmatic aversion to a natural theology that would reify social orders and conflate them with the divine command.

Barth's ethical instruction identifies spheres [*Bereich*] that delineate the boundaries within which agents can anticipate the fully specified divine command will come to them. These spheres refer to certain relationships and forms of activity that appear within broader modes of encounter. They include the worship of God, the relationship between men and women, and the relationship between parents and children. They represent dimensions or lines of continuity in

whether or not to have a child exemplifies the deliberative and discerning character of the testing that is ethical reflection, where one weighs the options and makes the best decision one can, well-aware that one's decision may not be the response of a right hearing of the divine command (III/4, 268-76). This deliberative activity extends to more mundane matters, such as decisions regarding dress and comportment in the obedient performance of one's sexed identity.

the specified command of God, and Scriptures play an important role in aiding his identification and depiction of these spheres.⁷ With regard to sexual difference, Genesis 2, the Songs of Songs, and a select set of Pauline texts play the dominant role in securing the relationship between man and woman as one such sphere, and he briefly summarizes his earlier exegetical work on these texts. However, he rejects the notion that the spheres are themselves the command of God, for they should not be seen as laws according to which God commands and humans do good or evil. Yet because he is confident that the numerous biblical instances of highly specific orders and directions collectively delineate these spheres, he is confident that God's command will not lead the hearer to transgress these spheres.⁸ Through inquiry into these spheres, moral theology of the sort Barth performs in §54 aims to investigate and describe the character that human action must exhibit and the standards or criteria by which it might expect God will decide, in any situation of decision, the good and evil of human action. However, moral theology cannot identify the particular action that God commands from among the possible actions that it finds to meet these criteria.⁹

⁷ See McKenny, 249-62 on the function of these spheres (or "domains" as he prefers to call them) in Barth's moral theology; see also Werpehowski, 23-32.

⁸ McKenny observes that by refusing to identify these spheres with the command of God, Barth continues to refuse the sort of orders of creation that might function to legitimize existing social and political arrangements, as was done in 1930s Germany. He attempts to distinguish these spheres from such orders by locating them within the history of the covenant of grace and, as such, knowable from the Word of God alone. They do not exist in nature or history independent of this covenant history. Scripture plays a fundamental role in identifying and describing these spheres, and Barth views laws such as the Decalogue and Sermon on the Mount not as general laws awaiting their specification, but rather as programs or summaries of the history of the covenant of God with God's people, within which such spheres can be delineated (*Analogy of Grace*, 251-4). Barth's figural reading of Gen. 2 serves this function in distinguishing the man-woman relationship as a prefiguration of Christ's relationship to the Church.

⁹ Ibid., 261. McKenny explains: "This kind of ethical inquiry can determine whether an act is a normal act that falls in the interior of a domain or a paradoxical act that falls on the boundary. But, it cannot determine whether, in a situation of decision, God will command a normal act or a paradoxical one" (261). As precisely this sort of exercise, McKenny argues that, for all his reservations over casuistry ethics, Barth actually gives casuistry ethics a necessary instructional role in preparing one for the encounter with the already specified divine command, even as he denies that it is casuistic ethics that gives us the actual, fully specified command of God (256-64). This is how I will read

§54 identifies three spheres of inter-human fellowship (man and woman, child and parent, near and distance neighbors). Barth argues that only the first two are secured by a biblical precedence indicative of a divine command identifying these as fixed and irreversible relationships. Only the first two spheres are “a constant determination of man whether in terms of creation, salvation or eschatology” (III/4, 304). A human being is always either male or female, and she or he is always the child of two parents in an irreversible and fixed relation. Both of these spheres have a subordinate agent (woman and child) who is to enact a distinctive form of deference to the other partner(s) (298-305).

The distinction between near and distances neighbors proves to be a fluid and reversible relationship, open to constant renegotiation, and free from the ordering of the other two relationships. This particular type of distinction will give me a helpful resource when questioning Barth’s efforts to secure the careful policing of sexual difference and its order, and also for reimagining the difference between the sexes as a more permeable one, open to contestation and renegotiation.

Barth’s description of the subordination of children to parents is a helpful resource for contesting the order of sexes. Barth is not plagued by the same loss of words when he speaks of the distinction between parents and children and the nature of the authority the former have over the later. He describes the wisdom and experience that distinguishes parents from children and

Barth’s moral instructions in §54.1. Having drawn on a number of scriptures to identify the relationship between man and woman as one such sphere, and having located marriage at its normative center, Barth will outline the general norms that his readers can expect to hear specified in the divine command, and toward this end he enlists Paul’s prescriptions regarding veil wearing as one such instance of the concretizing of a norm. His own readers should anticipate a command that concretizes that same norm: namely a norm that will direct one to one’s respective sexual identity and specify the precise way in which one should perform this sexual identity through the medium of contemporary cultural conventions. Ethical reflection will entail a critical relationship to these norms as it seeks to deliberate and discern the specific command of God.

secures the direction they are to give to children; he delineates the different stages through which the child develops, finally becoming an agent in his own right (moving from heteronomy to autonomy). His discussion does not entertain the question of whether and how this development differs for girls and boys (a noteworthy omission if we recall the claim that sexual differences is a structural divider that permeates and impacts all other modes of difference—surely this would warrant some discussion with respect to the oversight of children). The question of the sexual identity of the child aside, Barth secures for the growing child a developing and finally a robust account of agency and ethical deliberation wherein the child gradually comes to depend less and less on the guidance of parents (243-55). He will provide no such detail when speaking of the given alterity between the sexes, nor will he attempt to explain how women remain fully functioning agents under male precedence. He will simply assert that they do so. Silence will continue to substitute for any effort to reconcile the mutual activity of both sexes alongside the ordering of this activity.

Before developing his three guidelines on sexual difference and its order, Barth carefully demarcates his own ethic from his contemporaries by noting his intent to cast as broad a net as possible around the sphere of sexual difference. He will not reduce his discussion of the relationship between man and woman to the regulation of sexual activity, any more than he will reduce sexual difference to physiology or sexual functions. He has in view the spirit-impelled body to whom the divine command is addressed, and so his account will aim to encompass the whole agent—the would-be hearer of the divine address who hopes to conform him or herself to its requirements. Furthermore, he will not limit his discussion to the confines of marriage because he now finally acknowledges the celibacy of Christ and Paul and their words in-praise of

this state (142-8). Barth's three guidelines thus aim to have a broad reach, and so his extensive discussion of marriage is not integrated into the three guidelines, but follows after it.

Before presenting these guidelines, Barth secures a place for Christ's and Paul's celibacy within the sphere of the relationship between the sexes. In so doing Barth notes that he wants to relativize the place marriage has occupied and the exclusive attention it has received in traditional Reformed ethics, yet without denigrating its dignity.¹⁰ He intends a corrective to an evangelical ethic that has, since the Reformation, responded to a Roman Catholic privileging of celibacy by presenting marriage (with an end in procreation) as the superior state (140-1/155-6). If Paul and Christ were both celibate and both praised the celibate state, he argues, neither meant any denigration of marriage itself. Rather, Christ and Paul show us that there are different ways of expressing the relationship of Christ to the community. Both marriage and celibacy are spiritual gifts and vocations to which God calls some but not others. Marriage and celibacy are two types of callings to obedience of the one command, and neither has any inherent special dignity, although celibacy is a "direct imitation of the pattern set by Jesus Himself" (144). Barth can now finally admit that marriage is relativized with the advent of Christ, yet it does not follow the path he secures for procreation: "The clamp which made marriage a necessity for man and woman from their creation is not removed but it is certainly loosened. Marriage is no longer an absolute but a relative necessity. It is now one possibility among others" (144).

¹⁰ Barth looks first at Christ's unmarried state and some of Christ's comments on marriage (Mk. 10:1-12; Mt. 5:27-31). He observes that while Christ does not actually prohibit marriage, he points to (and himself takes) a different course, thereby relativizing marriage and showing that there is more than one way of imitating his relationship to the Church. Paul privileges celibacy as the higher way (I Cor. 7), and Barth's explanation (in keeping with his command ethics) is that for Paul and others like him, the specified command makes celibacy the higher way *for them*, but not for everyone. Barth is especially concerned to defend Paul from contemporaries who fault Paul for reducing marriage to a loophole for carnality, and so he is eager to show that Paul's preference for celibacy is not a denigration of the dignity of marriage (or the central normative place Barth wants to retain for it). For Barth, Paul's point in I Cor. 7 is that neither marriage or celibacy are a necessity, but rather both are spiritual vocations (I Cor. 7:39) (III/4, 146-148).

While marriage may be relativized by the possibility of the celibate life, Barth's depiction of inter-human fellowship remains heteronormative and complementarian. The distinction between the sexes is the primary distinguishing marker among human beings; the relationship between the sexes (with marriage at its normative center) continues to provide the opportunity for the fullest realization of inter-human fellowship (140). Barth integrates celibacy into this heteronormative framework by securing celibacy (and thus also the unmarried Christ, the unmarried Paul and their prescriptions on the topic) as boundary cases, (*Grenzfall*): such cases reside on the periphery of the relationship between the sexes yet belong to that sphere and legitimize marriage as that sphere's center. As McKenny explains, for Barth a "boundary case" is no lesser or greater state, but rather an obedience to a special situation. Boundary cases function not as exceptions to the fundamental principle and its specifications, but rather highly unusual, strange, or paradoxical instances of the latter.¹¹ Thus for Barth, Christ's specific and unique ontological existence requires his singular whole hearted devotion to all of humankind, and this calls for a relational orientation to multiple sites of alterity rather than to one particular member of the opposite sex. Paul answers a calling to a celibate state in response to the special set of ecclesial and missional contingencies that demand his attention and do not permit him the distractions inevitably arising in an intimate life-long fellowship with a wife (142-8). So, Barth writes, Paul and Christ teach us that "there are special situations which make decisions of this kind possible and necessary, and that to this extent there are those for whom entrance into the married state is not only not commanded but temporarily or even permanently forbidden" (144).

Marriage and with it Barth's heteronormative framing of inter-human alterity, remain central to §54. However in finally acknowledging and securing a place for celibacy in his ethic

¹¹ McKenny, 258-61.

of sexual difference, Barth has softened the emphasis he placed in III/1 and III/2 on marriage as the site in which inter-human fellowship is most fully realized. In order to accommodate an ethic for the single life, his sites are now fixed more generally on sexual difference itself (which we will see is always to be worked out in relationship to the opposite sex), and there will be more than one way to faithfully imitate Christ's relationship to his community, while remaining true to one's sexually specificity.

Christ's place on the boundaries of the sphere of "man and woman" continues to expose Barth's tenuous efforts in securing this one distinction at the heart of his theological anthropology. Jesus stands on the periphery of Barth's heteronormative framework not only because he is unmarried but also (as I noted in my previous chapter) because his sexed identity and his relationship to women eluded reference altogether, when Barth secured the christological grounding for inter-human fellowship in §45.1. We have now seen Barth employ two different strategies in his attempt to expand his heteronormative framework (secured through Genesis 2, the Songs, and Paul's bridal metaphor) to include Christ within it. Earlier, in §45.3 he secured Christ at the center of his heteronormative framework only by effacing Christ's unmarried state, his sexed identity, his life among a small circle of men, and then by marrying him to a metaphorical bride that encompasses all of the redeemed. Now, in §54.3 he can only acknowledge Christ's unmarried state if he consigns him to the horizons of his heteronormative framework. Christ thus proves difficult to integrate into Barth's account of sexual difference. If we should return Christ to the center of inter-human fellowship, then his fluid relationship to an ever-widening circle of near and distant neighbors might supplant the place Barth gives to sexual difference. In the next section Barth's inability to describe the nature of sexual difference will give further cause to question the central place and role Barth wants to secure for it.

ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR THE SEXUALLY DIFFERENTIATED SELF

Barth's description of the sphere of the relationship between man and woman falls into three sections, each of which delivers insights into the question of what the command of God is—of what is good and evil in the sphere of man and woman (149). The command of God will address and situate the self as: 1) either male or female, calling the self to gladly and gratefully embrace this identity and with it those (culturally contingent) features that differentiate it from its opposite; 2) as male and female together in an interpersonal relationship, with each oriented in its sexual specificity toward the opposite sex; 3) as male and female in subordination to an agential ordering in which the male assumes precedence and gives direction to their relational interactions and common life together. Barth intends these features to apply across the full range of inter-human relationships, but since he finds marriage to provide the occasion for the most concrete realization of the sexual relationship thus delineated, his discussion of these features is followed by a lengthy discussion of marriage itself. It is specifically with these three features that my reading is concerned, for it is here that the problematic aspects of his account of sexual difference and its ordering are developed.

“Male or Female”: the Difference between the Sexes

Barth tells his readers to expect a command that will address them in their fixed sexed identity, as either male or female, and so they are to gladly embrace and perform this distinctive identity (149). This requires a somewhat ambivalent (even critical) relation to the social norms and conventions that mediate the expression of this identity. Barth criticizes systematizations of sexual difference and indicates his intent not to offer any of his own. Brunner provides him an example of what is problematic in such caricatures. He quotes Brunner:

The man must be objective and universalise, woman must be subjective and individualise; the man must build, the woman adorn; the man must conquer, the woman must tend; the man must comprehend all with his mind, the woman must impregnate all with the life of her soul. It is the duty of man to plan and to master, of the woman to understand and to unite. (qtd. in III/4, 152)

Barth complains that not only do such systematizations hold up a descriptive picture (a caricature) in which few if any will recognize themselves,¹² they also impose an unlivable ought on the self. Thus, with regard to these words of Brunner's, he writes:

I quote this passage because over and above the characterisation it brings us into the sphere of an "ought" or "must," of definite tasks supposedly set the sexes in virtue of their inherent characteristics.... And how are these rather contingent, schematic, conventional, literary and half-true indicatives to be transformed into imperatives? Real man and real woman would then have to let themselves be told: Thou shalt be concerned with things (preferably machines) and thou with persons! Thou shalt cherish the mind, thou the soul! Thou shalt follow thy reason and thou thy instinct! Thou shalt be objective and thou subjective! Thou shalt build and thou merely adorn; thou shalt conquer and thou cherish etc.! Thou shalt! This is commanded thee! This is thy task! By exercising the one or the other function, thou shalt be faithful to thyself as man or woman! This is quite impossible. Obviously we cannot seriously address and bind any man or woman on these lines. They will justifiably refuse to be addressed in this way. On what authority are we told that these traits are masculine and these feminine? But if these descriptions fail us the moment we take them seriously and change them into imperatives, it is evident that we have moved onto ground which may be interesting but is extremely insecure. What, then, is the point of these typologies? [153-4]

I will recall these words later on when Barth forgets them and evokes the relationship between the letters A and B as a model in which his readers might recognize their own place in a properly ordered relationship with the opposite sex (169-70).

¹² The importance of being able to recognize oneself in such normative pictures is a concern Barth mentions more than once in §54. He says of Brunner's quote, "These things obviously cannot be said or heard in all seriousness. For they cannot be stated with real security. They cannot be stated in such a way that probably every third man and certainly every second woman does not become agitated and protest sharply against the very idea of seeing themselves in these sketches. Nor can they be stated in such a way that they will wholeheartedly accept the idea that this is what they, true man and true woman, ought to be, that here they see their true nature portrayed" (153). Some pages earlier, when criticizing another's description of the relationship between the sexes he says: "Has there ever been a couple that would seriously and sincerely recognise themselves in these ideal pictures, which, whether we call them frivolous or playful, are in any case quite intolerable because docetic?" (127/141).

Barth insists on the freedom of the divine command from such culturally contingent systematization, and thus on the freedom of men and women from “the self-imposed compulsion of such systematisation” (as helpful as he or others might find them on occasion to be) (153). He would have men and women instead persistently pursue a fresh hearing of God’s specific command to them, which he is confident they can discover for themselves, “without being enslaved to any preconceived opinions” (153). Barth imagines, then, a critical relationship to the culturally contingent norms and customs available for enacting one’s specific sexed identity, yet at the same time the performance must not transgress the boundary that distinguishes one sex from the other.

In order to preserve this freedom of the divine command, Barth will decline to describe what he imagines distinguishes the sexes from one another, and instead he limits himself to simply asserting the alterity between the sexes: we have here a “structural and functional distinction (*strukturellen und funktionellen Unterscheidung*) unique to this one relationship (117/128).¹³ The distinction is not reducible to psychology, biology, physiology, sexual function: while all of these have some part in its performance, he does not attempt to explain in what way they do so. He simply assumes his readers will recognize with him the givenness of this primal alterity:

No other distinction between man and man goes so deep as that in which the human male and the human female are so utterly different from each other. And no other relationship is so obvious, self-explanatory and universally valid as that whose force resides precisely in the presupposed underlying otherness. The female is to the male, and the male to the female, the other man and as such the fellow-man. It is with reason, therefore, that we

¹³ “The so-called races of mankind [*Menschenrassen*] are only variations of one and the same structure, allowing at any time the practical intermingling of the one with the other and consisting only in fleeting transitions from the one to the other, so that they cannot be fixed and differentiated with any precision but only very approximately, and certainly cannot be compared with the distinct species and subspecies of the animal kingdom” (286/344-5).

first enquire what the divine command has to say in this sphere of fellow-humanity.”
(117/129)¹⁴

Hence, while Barth is eager to unsettle and relativize the assumed givenness of an alterity between the races (as we saw in §18 and §41 and here in §54.3), he will depend on shared cultural assumptions to support his assertions about the givenness and primacy of sexual difference: it is not one difference among the many others that distinguishes human beings from each other, but a dividing line of alterity running through all other lesser differences. Since he dare not venture descriptive exercises of his own, he must instead make an appeal to its mystery:

We can call man and woman "he" and "she." We can describe individual men and women by their Christian names and surnames, their date of birth, family, birthplace or titles. But we have to realise that when we say all this we merely point to something which cannot be expressed, to the mystery in which man stands revealed to God and to Him alone. It is at the point where he is indefinable that he is sought and found by the divine command, that the decision is made, that he is obedient or disobedient, good or bad. It is here that man and woman affirm their sex or deny it. We cannot really characterise man and woman in the form of a definition, but only as we recall that in their very differentiation God has willed and made them in mutual relation and that His command has also the dimension or component that in the interests of this relationship they must be true to their specific differentiations. We have no right, especially if we ask concerning the command of God, to define or describe this differentiation. (150-1)

The veil shrouding God's distinctive nature has proven far less opaque to this dogmatician, and Barth is more forthcoming when describing other inter-human differences in §54. In §54.2 he

¹⁴ At points he echoes the rhetoric of romantic love, as he sympathizes with but faults those who deify the sexual relationship (121-129/134-142): "What else can stir him so much, bringing him as he thinks-whether he be a crude or a highly cultivated person-into such ecstasy, such rapture, such enthusiasm, into what seem to be the depths and essence of all being, into contemplation of the Godhead and participation in it, supposedly exalting him into the vicinity at least of another God and Creator-what else can do this like the primal experience of encounter between male and female?....Even in the depths and heights, the self-recollection and rapture, the immanence and transcendence of this primal experience, he is still a creature. And whatever the command wills of him, it is the command of God. An alien and superior will confronts him at this climax of his self-affirmation and self-denial, in this immanence and transcendence. It shows him that in all the seriousness and rapture of this dialectic he is still not his own master. In face of the dialectic which transports him it reveals a higher and impregnable place, and it lets it be understood that from this place there is One who rules, commands, permits and also forbids. From this place there is heard in the voice of the Law, in the midst of the storms of passion or the whispers of sublimated ecstasy, a critical and judicial Yes and No by which man is tested and must test himself" (120/128-9).

locates the difference between child and parent in the wisdom and knowledge that children depend on from their parents in changing degrees as they age (253-5). In §54.3 he offers a detailed discussion of how language, geography, and history locate the self among near neighbors and on a journey toward more distant neighbors (289-98).¹⁵ It is only before the mystery of sexual difference that Barth bows in silence. He can only recall God's creation of man and woman in the Genesis creation narratives, assert an alterity between the sexes, and rely on his reader's shared assumptions to do the heavy lifting for him. However, the unspeakable character of this supposedly self-evident "structural difference" invites us to turn on it the same critical eye that Barth turns on racial and ethnic differences.

Barth encourages his readers to seek to discern for themselves what the command of God demands of each of them (153).¹⁶ He assures them that they should anticipate from the start that it will entail the concretization of two important prohibitions. First, they should not seek to

¹⁵ When Barth argues for relativity and fluidity of boundary dividing one people group from the other, he raises the sort of questions I am directing to his reification of sexual difference through the performance of gender norms: "It is to be noted further that the confrontation of near and distant neighbours is fluid. Who can really say strictly and definitively what he means when he speaks of his people and foreigners? Where does the one cease and where do the others begin? We do not need to be Alsations to find it difficult to answer. Is our own people that of the same village? Why not? But then we should perhaps be more exact and say the part of our village distinguished by a certain particularity of situation and population. Yet the foreign people of the neighbouring village obviously belongs to the same valley. The valley then? But the dialect spoken in the neighbouring valley is probably very closely related to that spoken here. The people of an inter-related district then? But the foreign people of a neighbouring district has perhaps shared the same history for centuries. The greater construct, then, which is called a nation in geography and world history and politics? This may well be, except that these are very doubtful unities in respect of two or more such characteristics as speech, location and history, not to speak of race, and that there are wide stretches of border country in which fluctuation can be suppressed only artificially or by the use of force. And what is really the inward aspect of these peoples?" (300). Here the resistance of difference to description suggests its fluidity, but with sexual difference the same suggests its fixity.

¹⁶ "Thus it is the command of God itself which tells them what here and now is their male or female nature, and what they have to guard faithfully as such. As the divine command is itself free from the systematisation by which man and woman seek to order and clarify their thoughts about their differentiation, so, in requiring fidelity, it frees man and woman from the self-imposed compulsion of such systematisation. To what male or female nature must they both be true? Precisely to that to which they are summoned and engaged by the divine command-to that which it imposes on them as it confronts them with its here-and-now requirement. As this encounters them, their particular sexual nature will not be hidden from them. And in this way the divine command permits man and woman continually and particularly to discover their specific sexual nature, and to be faithful to it in this form which is true before God, without being enslaved to any preconceived opinions." (153)

exchange the features of their own sex for that of the other (an envious grasping that Barth associates more often with women than with men). Second, they should not attempt to occupy a midway position that is neither one nor the other, that views the distinguishing features of the sexes as external and incidental to a sexless third thing (144-56/170 -73).

Resisting these two errors, his readers should aspire to a deliberative, thoughtful, exhaustive, and all-embracing performance of their God-assigned sex, one that adheres resolutely to the appropriate side of the dividing line by way of available cultural conventions (144/170-1).¹⁷ The reader should expect the divine command to extend to and have relevance for every aspect of the performance of his or her sexual identity.

On the one hand, this will require some sort of adherence to available conventions. Barth makes this clear when once again he names his proto-feminists at Corinth as examples of those who would flee their sex, first by refusing the custom of donning veils (I Cor. 11) and second by refusing to respect the convention that women keep silent in church (I Cor. 14) (156/173).¹⁸ Barth lumps the modern feminist movement into this same category of those who would flee their sex, for here he finds “a more or less express and definite desire on the part of women to occupy the position and fulfil the function of men” (155). Indeed, the very desire of feminists for revolution is itself an attempt to appropriate the dubious project of the male sex, and the entire movement betrays “an element of theoretical and emotional pathos in the direction of an

¹⁷ He writes, “each man and woman owes it not only to himself but also to the other always to be faithful to his own sexual characteristics. Fellowship is always threatened when there is a failure at this point either on the one side or the other” (144/170-1).

¹⁸ In regard to Paul’s words, Barth writes: “The essential point is that woman must always and in all circumstances be woman; that she must feel and conduct herself as such and not as a man; that the command of the Lord, which is for all eternity, directs both man and woman to their own proper sacred place and forbids all attempts to violate this order. The command may be given a different interpretation from that of Paul, for it is the living command of the living Lord. Yet if it is to be respected at all it cannot even for a moment or in any conceivable sense be disregarded in this its decisive expression and requirement” (156/173).

exchange of one's own sex for the other which cannot be explained merely by this revolution and in regard to which further clarification is necessary" (155). Rather than hear in the voice of feminists the self-revealing corrective of the "Thou" (that generous hearing Barth prescribed in §45.2), Barth dismisses their claims as a self-asserting reach for the prerogatives of his sex.

On the other hand, Barth's command ethics requires a critical relationship to conventional categories and norms and so he adds an important qualification: "Of course, it is not a question of keeping any special masculine or feminine standard. We have just seen that the systematisations to which we might be tempted in this connexion do not yield any practicable imperatives. Different ages, peoples and cultures have had very different ideas of what is concretely appropriate, salutary and necessary in man and woman as such" (144/170-1). He goes on to instruct women (especially would-be feminists) to occupy a critical relationship to the conventions that enable them to distinguish themselves from the opposite sex, and to discern for themselves how they shall express and perform their sexual specificity:

The question what specific activity woman will claim and make her own as woman ought certainly to be posed in each particular case as it arises, not in the light of traditional preconceptions, but honestly in relation to what is aimed at in the future. Above all, woman herself ought not to allow the uncalled-for illusions of man, and his attempts to dictate what is suitable for her and what is not, to deter her from continually and seriously putting this question to herself. (155)

These are encouraging words, until we recall Barth's categorization of the activities of the proto-feminists of Corinth and the modern feminist movement. The implication is that women are free to critically renegotiate and inhabit the conventions of their time (discerning for themselves the command of God to them), as long as they do not encroach on the activities, conventions, and prerogatives that men have already carved out for themselves. Should their efforts transgress these boundaries then they are not entitled to the generous hearing that Barth described in §45.2 and will again describe in this paragraph: a hearing that does not dismiss the other's speech as

self-assertion but instead receives it as an aid-lending critical corrective to one's own assumptions. In his depiction of the feminist movement, Barth does not play the "I" of §45.2. Rather he assumes his place in the order, playing Adam instead, by setting the terms under which any interaction between the sexes will precede. He diagnoses, describes and dismisses the activity of these women as an envious self-assertive, power-grab.

Precisely because these agents are to occupy a critical relationship to cultural conventions while at the same time appropriating them in order to stay true to their own specificity, Barth incites his reader to the exhaustive [and exhausting] task of holding themselves accountable to what the command of God might be in every moment and decision, for:

there is hardly a possibility of everyday life which is ethically irrelevant in this respect or falls outside the scope of this distinction, even down to the problems of dress and outward bearing. Nothing is indifferent in this connexion. The decision with regard to this requirement of faithfulness to sex is made at every point by both man and woman. (155)

Barth anticipates the need for a continuous self-policing that resists the temptation of intruding on the distinctive features and characteristics of the opposite sex, whatever they might be. In regard to the relativity of social mores, norms and conventions, he writes:

But this does not mean that the distinction between masculine and non-masculine or feminine and unfeminine being, attitude and action is illusory. Just because the command of God is not bound to any standard it makes this distinction all the more sharply and clearly. This distinction insists upon being observed. It must not be blurred on either side. The command of God will always point man to his position and woman to hers. In every situation, in face of every task and in every conversation, their functions and possibilities, when they are obedient to the command, will be distinctive and diverse, and will never be interchangeableBut there are real violations and offences. They arise where the one sex or the other forgets, or for any reason refuses to acknowledge, that it has its right and dignity only in relation to the opposite sex and therefore in distinction from it. Such a forgetting or refusal will immediately disclose itself even outwardly as a blunder, error or disturbance. The root of fellow-humanity and of humanity generally is thus affected. A desire which at this point might include jealousy, envy, imitation or usurpation can never in any circumstances be good, whereas a pure desire will constantly and surely lead man and woman back to their place.(144/170-1)

Barth does not conflate the divine command with any of the norms and conventions through which obedience to the command is mediated. He abstracts the binary of sexual difference from its instantiation in such conventions and renders it an unassailable law, detached from the social sphere of conventions and mores, but always to be expressed and performed and shored up within that sphere. The performance of one's sex proves to be the mechanism by which this difference is continually reproduced and stabilized, and so it might also be the mechanism by which this difference is undermined and destabilized. This very susceptibility of sexual difference to such subversive and transgressive performances is perhaps what drives Barth's words here and his concern with the securing of the distinction. I shall exploit this susceptibility in my final conclusion.¹⁹

"Male and Female": the Relationship between the Sexes

Barth's second pedagogical insight further develops the ethical dimensions of the intersubjective encounter described in III/2, §45.2, but now he foregrounds the alterity between the sexes as the occasion for the exchange, and he further specifies the critical character of their interaction, specifically with respect to the norms which distinguish one sex from the other. As we saw in §18 and §45.2, the unsettling effect of the other on the self calls for a critique of one's own assumptions. Confrontation with the mystery that is the opposite sex now provides the primary occasion for this sort of work on the self, for "among the immediate data of existence there is certainly no greater riddle for man than the fact of the existence of woman and the question as to her nature" (and vice versa); hence "to live humanly means never to escape the

¹⁹ My analysis and critique of the relationship Barth establishes between sexual difference and the culturally contingent norms and customs that mediate it's performance is indebted to Judith Butler's *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), esp. 40-56, 174-203.

astonishment of one's own sex at the other, and the desire of one's sex to understand the other” (167/185).²⁰

As we saw in the I/Thou encounter of §45.2, the quest for knowledge of the other entails putting questions to the other: the two sexes are to pursue a knowledge of the each other, “not, then, as if they already knew about one another; not on the basis of a preconceived general or even personal judgment of men about women or of women about men; but with unprejudiced eyes and generous hearts, always ready to learn something new, to turn the corner and see something better” (167/185). Thus, the faithful performance of one’s sexed identity is answerable not only to the divine judgment, but also (and as such) to the critical questions the opposite sex puts to one’s own sex. One must allow oneself to be put into question by the other’s norms, and must respond by way of the terms their questions impose, with the intent of making oneself intelligible to them. Each sex is answerable to the other’s inquiries, and must give an account of itself to the other. The faithful performance of one’s sexed identity, the careful maintenance of its specificity, is to unfold in this dynamic and critical exchange with the sexually differentiated other.²¹

²⁰ Barth writes: “Among the immediate data of existence there is certainly no greater riddle for man than the fact of the existence of woman and the question as to her nature. And on the other hand the same applies to women. We need not think that a man can exist without encountering this riddle and being occupied with it, nor need we think that he has already solved it. To live humanly means never to escape the astonishment of one's own sex at the other, and the desire of one's sex to understand the other” (167/185).

²¹ Barth writes: “But each sex has also to realise that it is questioned by the other. The puzzle which the opposite sex implies for it is not theoretical but practical, not optional but obligatory, not factual but human. It is the great human puzzle which as man and woman they put to one another in their mutual confrontation. As man and woman are human in their co-existence and mutual confrontation, neither the one nor the other can be content with his own sexuality or heedlessly work out his sexually conditioned capacities, needs, interests, tendencies, joys and sorrows. Man is unsettled by woman and woman by man. There is always this unsettlement by the opposite sex where there is the encounter of man and woman. Each is asked by the opposite sex: Why, *quo iure*, are you *de facto* so utterly different from myself? Can and will you guarantee that your mode of life which disconcerts me is also human? Can you show me this in such a way that I can understand it? There is such a thing as a silent but severe criticism which tacitly but persistently and in all conceivable forms passes between man and woman in their mutual relationships. The woman stands always in a certain tension to the man, and the man to the woman. No one can escape this

As they consider one another and necessarily realise that they question each other, they become mutually, not the law of each other's being (for each must be true to his particularity), but the measure or criterion of their inner right to live in their sexual distinctiveness....They are not to elude their mutual responsibility, but to fulfil it. And, of course, they must fulfil it even when no representative of the opposite sex is present. As a norm and criterion the opposite sex is always and everywhere invisibly present. The divine decision that it is not good for man to be alone has been taken irrevocably; and it applies to woman as well as to man. (167-8)²²

The performance of one's sexed identity is not, then, an isolated quest to discern and enact the will of God, but an activity that seeks to hear the voice of God in the critique that the sexually differentiated other directs at the self. The unsettling effects that the other has on the self, the many ways in which the other puts the self into question, opens opportunity for self-critique, for evaluating one's own norms, values, and performances specifically as a sexed self, and to correct one's assumptions about the other, as one inquires into who the other is. Furthermore, it is only through this critical interaction with the norms of the opposite sex that one can properly police and maintain one's own sexual distinctiveness. This critical interaction is with culturally contingent norms and conventions. For, as the quote above suggests, these norms for sexual specificity are always present, even when a member of the opposite sex is not. The norms and

unsettlement, this criticism and tension. To live humanly means to hear and face this question at the expense on both sides of self-glorification or simply of self-satisfaction" (167/186).

²² Barth writes: "Man can be and speak and act as a true man only as he realises that in so doing he must answer the question of woman, i.e., give her an account of his humanity. Much that is typically masculine would have to be left unsaid and undone, or said and done quite differently, if man remembered that in it, if it is to be truly masculine, he must prove his humanity in the eyes of woman, to whom he constitutes so great a question mark. For example, might not the very dubious masculine enterprise of war become intrinsically impossible if the remembrance of the confrontation with woman were suddenly to be given the normative significance which is undoubtedly its due? When man excuses himself from this recollection, he strengthens rather than dispels woman's natural doubt of his humanity. And the more he strengthens her doubt, and the bond of fellowship between them is therefore weakened, so much the more doubtful does his humanity become even objectively, and so much the more is humanity as such called in question for both sides. On the other hand, exactly the same can be said of feminine being and speaking and acting. Woman, too, is challenged by the natural criticism of man to prove herself human in his eyes. If she may and must live out her life as woman, she too must consider that she has to render an account to man as he must render an account to her, that she is measured by his norms as he by hers. For this reason all the movements of man and woman in which there is an open or secret attempt to escape this reciprocal responsibility are suspect at least from the very outset. On both sides, everything is at stake here" (167-8).

criteria of the opposite sex are thus not reducible to the speech, address, or questioning of specific individuals that appropriate them, but are always in some sense present. The scene of address between self and sexually differentiated other is thus mediated through the contingent cultural norms and conventions that are open to critical evaluation and renegotiation. The performance of one's sexed specificity is then in some sense always to be undertaken in a critical and reflective relationship to the norms and conventions through which sexual difference is expressed.²³ They are open to renegotiation, resistance and subversion, and yet any such activity must resist transcending the dividing line of sexual difference itself.

It is helpful at this juncture once again to compare the interaction between the sexes with the interaction of the self with those who are distinguished by a different, geographical location, history of traditions, and customs—Barth's distinction between near and distant neighbors. He describes it in §54.3, and he evokes this distinction (rather than sexual difference) in his §45.1 depiction of Christ's relationship to his fellows (285-98). Unlike sexual difference Barth finds this particular difference to be a fluid one: as the self moves to a knowledge and understanding of the other, transgressing the boundaries of language, custom and geography, the distinction between one's near neighbors and one's distant neighbors is continually re-negotiated. Even though language has a central role in mediating the relationship of self to other, language barriers and alien social customs do not produce an alterity more mystifying than that of a member of the

²³ Barth's account here of the critical relationship of the self with the opposite sex resonates with what Judith Butler explores and appropriates in post-Hegelian accounts of recognition. Like Barth here, she interrogates the ethical dimensions of the direct address "Who are you?", but she does so by foregrounding the social dimensions of normativity that precede and condition the dyadic exchanges, constituting the intelligibility of the subject and mediating the scene of recognition and address wherein one gives account of oneself, attempting to make oneself intelligible to the other. The terms in which we give account of ourselves are not of our own making, but are social in character. So when one attempts to give an account of oneself to another or to hear the account the other, one stands in relation to a set of social norms and constraints (Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* [New York: Fordham, 2005], 3-40). Butler's appropriation of post-Hegelian accounts of recognition is a helpful resource in exposing not only the role that social conventions play for Barth in mediating the relationship of self to other but also their susceptibility to critique and renegotiation.

opposite sex who shares one's own language and customs. While both relationships require a movement toward a deeper knowledge and understanding of the other, Barth intends the interaction with the sexually differentiated other to secure, maintain, and stabilize the distinction between self and the opposite sex: the self can more securely perform its distinctive sexual identity through exposure to the norms of the other. By contrast one's interaction with more distant neighbors should aim to reduce the distance between self and other, as one seeks a knowledge of the other by crossing the boundaries of language, geography and custom in order to understand them. Such a crossing is not permitted to sexed agents who would resist the temptation to flee their sex and appropriate the norms, prerogatives and conventions proper to the opposite sex. The dividing line between self and distant neighbor is not fixed, and it is to be continually transgressed. The very categories of language, geography, custom, and history are highly fluid, as Barth sees them, and they do not fall easily along racial or ethnic lines.

Barth argues that this sphere of near and distant neighbors is not subjected to the same specificity of a divine command as are the other two spheres (man and woman, parent and child): a command of God creates the spheres of man and woman and parent child (each with its own independent set of constraints), but no such command creates one's relationship to a specific people group, race, or nation. Rather, there is but one sphere encompassing all of humanity; and one finds oneself among one's near neighbors and on the way (out of isolation) toward a knowledge and interaction with more distance neighbors, in a dynamic movement that continually redraws the boundaries between "near" and "far" as one moves beyond the confines of one's own dialect, language, locale, customs, and history to understand and relate to the gradually-less-distant other (299-305). The Christ of §45.1 provides the christological template for this movement of self to other.

I would suggest that it is this type of distinction that has the christological resources for overshadowing and reconfiguring both the primacy and fixity of sexual difference in Barth's anthropology and ethics. If we move Christ from the margins of Barth's heteronormative construal of inter-human fellowship back to the center, we have a model of agency that places the self in an ever widening circle of near and distant neighbors: a broad sphere encompassing multiple sites of alterity. In this sphere we can re-imagine sexual difference as one among other fluid and open-ended distinctions, rather than the overarching distinction that cuts through all others.

In a lengthy section of fine print in §54.3, Barth makes explicit the impact that Nazi ideology of the 1930s has on his construal of fluidity between near and distant neighbors. It had a comparable impact on his subversion of ethnic distinctions in §18, as I argued in Chapter 1. His aversion to an orders of creation framework that reifies racial differences and supports nationalistic fervor underlies his refusal to fix the distance between the self and the foreign other. It is this very aversion to the orders of creation that makes his reification of sexual difference so difficult for him to explain and describe (304-22). For Barth, the distinctions of ethnicity and race prove to be secondary features of human nature in a way that sexual difference is not, even if the mores through which it is expressed are always changing and subject to critique and renegotiation.²⁴ Yet the dispensability of sexual difference to Christ's saving identity suggests that the same applies to sexual difference itself. The careful yet critical maintenance of one's sexual specificity might readily become a subversive, transgressive performance that unsettles

²⁴ "As man, he is necessarily male or female and not free to be the other or without the other. As man, he is necessarily the child of his father and, if a father, the father of his child, and not free to be the other or without the other. As man, however, he is not necessarily but only factually, though perhaps very ardently, a citizen of Basel, or a Swiss, or a Spaniard, or an African. As man, he might equally well be the other or without the other. This belongs only to the pilgrim's clothing which he has put on and will put off again. He is not fellow-human in the mere fact that he wears this clothing or finds himself in this confrontation" (302).

the presumed alterity by an appropriation of norms that crosses boundaries between one sex and the other. Barth's career-long aversion to natural theology, combined with his resistance to the sort of theologies that supported Nazi ideology, culminates in a command ethic that requires a critical relationship to social conventions; this critical relationship does not sit comfortably with Barth's efforts to police and maintain the distinction and order between the sexes.

It is not surprising that Barth's only discussion of homosexuality is found in a brief excursus in this particular section of §54 (165-7/184-8). He broaches the topic as he casts suspicion on men and women who segregate themselves from the opposite sex, whether in same-sex social groups or religious orders. The decision to live in same-sex communities or groups may more often or not be expressive of a flight from human fellowship, a preference for isolation and self-love; for human fellowship must have the riddle of the opposite sex driving and directing it in some capacity. This preference for the company of the same sex may lead to same-sex attraction:

These first steps may well be symptoms of the malady called homosexuality. This is the physical, psychological and social sickness, the phenomenon of perversion, decadence and decay, which can emerge when man refuses to admit the validity of the divine command in the sense in which we are now considering it. (166)

With the use of Romans 1, Barth situates homosexuals in a circle of isolated self-love: they refuse to recognize God and so refuse also to appreciate and embrace their fellow-human being. Because this despised fellow (the sexually differentiated other) remains the desirable subject to which God directs the self, desire for the opposite finds its substitute in desire for the same. Hence, "there follows the corrupt emotional and finally physical desire in which—in a sexual union which is not and cannot be genuine—man thinks that he must seek and can find in man, and woman in woman, a substitute for the despised partner" (166).

Unlike his discussion of sexual alterity itself, Barth here explicitly allows cultural assumptions to shape his depiction of homosexuality when he names it a “physical, psychological and social sickness” and declares: “naturally the command of God is opposed to these courses. This is almost too obvious to need stating” (166). He warns his readers that:

the real perversion takes place, the original decadence and disintegration begins, where man will not see his partner of the opposite sex and therefore the primal form of fellow-man, refusing to hear his question and to make a responsible answer, but trying to be human in himself as sovereign man or woman, rejoicing in himself in self-satisfaction and self-sufficiency. (166)

As is customary when Barth emphasizes the centrality of the sexually differentiated other to human fellowship, he does not, at this juncture, mention the gospels’ pictures of the unmarried Jesus and his intimate inner circle of twelve men. He makes only a passing reference to “an emergency measure” that might justify a decision to live in same-sex groups—a backward glance to his earlier discussion on celibacy, although he does not actually name Christ or Paul here. With Paul and his higher way (I Cor. 7:38) and Christ and his eunuchs (Mtt. 19:11-12) safely confined to the boundaries of the sphere of the relationship between the sexes, Barth need not allow his suspicion of same-sex communities to cast a shadow on the examples of Christ and Paul, nor need he allow their examples to put into question his own assumptions about the necessity of the opposite sex for human fellowship.²⁵

²⁵ Jaime Balboa (“A Constructivist-Gay Liberationist Reading of Barth,” 771-789) offers a critique of Barth’s discussion of homosexuality that resonates with my own in so far as it argues that Barth’s sexual difference rests, in spite of himself, on natural categories (i.e. the naturally sexed body desiring in a specific direction), and that in this respect he resorts to natural theology. Eugene Rogers (*Sexuality and the Christian Body*) offers a book-length interrogation of Barth’s account of sexual difference, which he finds to be the strongest theological account of the complementarity of the sexes that there is. His stated intent is to preserve the central Pauline symbology that finds in the love of Christ for the church a model of marriage, but he wants to free Barth’s depiction of co-humanity from compulsory complementarity, arguing that while male-female complementarity may be typical of co-humanity, it need not be essential (141-7). His book looks at parallel problems in Barth’s construction of Gentiles-Jews and his construction of men-women. From that angle, Jews become, for Barth, the observable and effective representative of the human predicament and homosexuals becomes the observable and effective representative of sin, qua Rom. 1 (154).

“A and B”: The Order between the Sexes

Barth's discussion of the interaction between the sexes parallels that of §45.2 in highlighting the mutuality between the sexes, wherein each summons the other to give account of him or herself. Barth notes again that this is what the egalitarian note of Galatians 3 refers to (164/182). With his third pedagogical insight he now turns to the ordering of the sexes.

Barth begins by introducing his own peculiar systematization of sexual difference, one that begs for the criticism he earlier directed at Brunner's stereotypes. To illuminate what he means by an irreversible order (and to attempt at the same time to reconcile the order of the sexes with the mutuality between the sexes), he presents the reader with the irreversible sequence and inter-dependence between the first two letters of the alphabet.²⁶

They [man and woman] stand in a sequence. It is in this that man has his allotted place and woman hers. It is in this that they are orientated on each other. It is in this that they are individually and together the human creature as created by God. Man and woman are not an A and a second A whose being and relationship can be described like the two halves of an hour glass, which are obviously two, but absolutely equal and therefore interchangeable. Man and woman are an A and a B, and cannot, therefore, be equated. In inner dignity and right, and therefore in human dignity and right, A has not the slightest advantage over B, nor does it suffer the slightest disadvantage. What is more, when we say A we must with equal emphasis say B also, and when we say B we must with equal emphasis have said A. (169/187-8)

This proposal comes with familiar assurances that no offense need be taken on the part of woman, for if the letter A does not enjoy any advantage over the letter B as far as letters go, man should not think himself superior to woman or permitted to degrade her, nor should woman think

²⁶ Barth writes: “We have considered this equality of man and woman as carefully as possible in our first two propositions, and not one iota of it must be forgotten or abrogated as we now turn in the third to the order in which their being no less than their being in fellowship is real, and therefore to the requirement of the divine command in so far as it includes the observance of this order....Yet the fact remains-and in this respect there is no simple equality-that they are claimed and sanctified as man and woman, each for himself, each in relation to the other in his own particular place, and therefore in such a way that A is not B but A, and B is not another A but B. It is here that we see the order outside which man cannot be man nor woman be woman, either in themselves or in their mutual orientation and relationship” (169/187-8).

herself entitled to envy or grasp at his prerogative. Letters now illuminate the interaction between self-revealing agents and model the appropriate dispositions (170-71/189-90). Barth is quick to enlist other (equally odd) metaphors, citing approvingly (without further elaboration) the words of another author: "Woman is related to man as the service corps to the fighting troops, as the laboratory to the factory, the lawgiver to the sheriff" (173).²⁷

How can such relations of sequence possibly shed light on all he has just said of the performance of a two-way self-revelation and critical correction? Why would his readers recognize their relationship with the opposite sex here if they cannot in Brunner's caricatures? How does the order between two letters of the alphabet direct his readers to a livable ought? These are not questions Barth answers, for presumably he thinks he can dodge them by abstracting first the difference and then its order from the social customs and conventions in which they are enfleshed. So, once again Barth is at a loss of words when it comes to sexual difference: "Every word is dangerous and liable to be misunderstood when we try to characterise this order" (169-70/189). He vaguely gestures to some sort of sequential precedence and initiative on the part of males who would pattern their activity after the letter A:

A precedes B, and B follows A. Order means succession [*Folge*]. It means preceding and following [*Vorordnung und Nachordnung*]. It means super- and sub-ordination [*Überordnung und Unterordnung*]. But when we say this we utter the very dangerous words which are unavoidable if we are to describe what is at issue in the being and fellowship of man and woman. (169-70)

With such (unnamed) dangers restraining him, he can only tell us that the man bares the "primacy of service" (171.2: 190/191), and he fulfills his role "in preceding her, taking the lead as the inspirer, leader and initiator in their common being and action." He does this "as he first

²⁷ Barth write: "With the reservation which is applicable to all metaphors, especially those drawn from modern life, we may quote the illustration used by Franz J. Leenhardt: "Woman is related to man as the service corps to the fighting troops, as the laboratory to the factory, the lawgiver to the sheriff." In any case, it is as well to bear in mind the rich significance of the notion" (173).

enters into fellowship with her, as he first bows before the common law of humanity as fellow-humanity” (170-71/189-90).

Barth reminds the reader that in doing this, the male is imitating “the archetypal love with which Jesus Christ has loved and still loves His church,” and in so doing playing Adam:

In the light of that archetypal love, [man is] to love her as himself, to treat her as the fellow-creature without whom he himself could not be a man and could not be saved, in whose person he has in every respect to do with himself, in whom he does himself good or harm, honour or dishonour, glory or shame, with whom he stands or falls, whose existence first gives true humanity to his own. This is man's special responsibility in this order. He can and should precede woman by affirming and accepting and living with her in this way, by doing (v. 31 f.) exactly what man (Gen. 2) did at the climax of his creation: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife. (175)

Of course, the relation between Christ and the church does in fact entail a difference in “inner dignity and right” and Christ does retain a significant ontological advantage, which is perhaps why Barth finds it necessary to introduce letters of the alphabet for further assurance about the undiminished dignity of women. But there is little assurance to be found when we recall Barth’s model human agent in §45.2, patterned after Christ’s love for his fellows, with its ethical obligation conformed to reflect Christ’s initiating and gracious incarnational descent to and on behalf of the needs of his fellows. From the vantage point of §45.2, the question remains: what is left for the female agent to “do” if not also to imitate Christ in this way? Since Barth here recalls the image of a seeking desiring electing Adam, the answer to this question must be the image of the silent, immobile Eve whose inactivity (that “act” wherein she consents to let Adam act for and on her behalf) secures and exposes Adam’s privileged place. Yet Barth continually insists that woman is to be a fully functioning, ethically responsible agent, even if he cannot tell us how.

Barth next develops a sequence of highly generalized depictions of the properly-ordered and disordered relationships, admittedly resorting to a systematization and caricatures of his

own.²⁸ First he briefly describes what a model relationship looks like. He then gives a lengthier description of what a disordered relationship looks like and the trajectory it usually takes. He finally provides some general instructions as to how those who recognize themselves in the disordered model might return their relationship to its proper order: how they might become the “kind man” [*der gütigen Mann*] and the “self-restraining” or “modest” woman [*die bescheidende Frau*]. This narrative will further exposes the problems, tensions, and ambiguities that arise in Barth efforts both to preserve the agency and ethical responsibility of the woman, while at the same time setting restraints on her so that man may play his determining part.

Barth’s model relationship features the “strong (*starke*) man” and the “mature (*mundige*) woman.” This man oversees the proper interaction and ordering between the sexes, for

he will not leave it to chance whether the order subsists and prevails. Nor will he wait for woman to do her part in serving it. On the contrary, he will forestall her in this....He will really be superior only in so far as he will primarily accept as his own a concern for the right communion of the sexes as secured by this order, and therefore for the order itself. He is strong to the extent that he accepts as his own affair service to this order and in this order. He is strong as he is vigilant for the interests of both sexes. (176-7/197)

Barth does not explain what this leaves for the mature woman to do, but it would seem that she is to allow him the ethical busy-work of discerning the proper communication and interaction between the sexes, to assume the greater burden of ethical deliberation itself, with respect to their co-existence.²⁹ In describing her part, Barth is concerned less with what she might “do” and

²⁸ He writes: “This is the task to which we must now briefly address ourselves. It will inevitably entail a certain systematisation, almost a kind of woodcut” (175/196).

²⁹ In this respect Barth participates in an ethical idealistic trajectory in which men alone are fully formed ethical agents and women depend on the reasoning capacities and ethical deliberation of men. Masculine active spontaneity is contrasted with feminine passivity, and female activity is depicted as merely the development of that which has been received through the spontaneous active influence of the male (see Patricia E. Guenther-Gleason, *On Schleiermacher and Gender Politics*, 138-9, 162-93, 277-9, 350). Guenther-Gleason describes this two world account, especially as it is found in Kant and Schlegel: women become conflated with the sensuous impulse that must be subordinated to the rational impulse, and men alone overcome nature with reason, while women are reduced to dependency on men. She shows that Schlegel and Schleiermacher attempt to resist this ethical and aesthetic

more with her appropriate dispositions, which he suspects are inclined toward an envious self-assertion:

[her] only thought is to take up the position which falls to her in accordance with this order, desiring nothing better than that this order should be in force, and realising that her own independence, honour and dignity, her own special wishes and interests, are best secured within it. Thus in regard to the precedence which she sees man assume in this matter, she will feel no sense of inferiority nor impulse of jealousy. She will not consider herself to be attacked by this, but promoted and protected. She will see guarded by it just what she herself desires to see guarded. She has no need to assert herself by throwing out a challenge to man. She will perceive the opportunity which man places within her grasp. She will not merely accept his concern for the order and for herself, but make it her joy and pride as woman to be worthy of this concern, i.e., to be a free human being alongside man and in fellowship with him. (176-7/197-8)

denigration of women, while maintaining a difference between the sexes. They are critical of an ethical trajectory in which subjects are supposed to develop from embeddedness in nature to reason's freedom from it, and they challenge this trajectory's ambivalence toward the feminine in its affiliation with nature and religion. They re-describe this path as a development toward awareness of the original unity of nature and reason, experienced profoundly through love which embraces the differences between the sexes. By transforming the stereo-typical function of the feminine in its application to women, religion and beauty, they rescue these beings and aspects of life from an idealism that locates them at a lower stage of consciousness from which only men can emerge (162-93).

Like Schlegel and Schleiermacher, Barth wants to maintain the full agential dignity of men and women along with the difference between the sexes. Yet because the latter entails, for Barth, the subordination and dependency of female agency on male, he does not avoid the pitfalls of the idealistic tradition's ethical denigration of women. If we follow the implications of his account, we ultimately arrive at a place he does not want to go: women must depend on the ethical capacities of men, and with Barth's command ethic in view, this means that men mediate the command of God to women. Thus Barth participates in an ethical tradition wherein men give the law to women, for men retain a directing role of discerning the command as it applies to the interaction between the sexes and the ways in which they each realize their sexual specificity. Charlotte von Kirschbaum is more explicit about this agential dependency than Barth in her published lecture "Jesus Christ and the Church" (*The Question of Woman*, 55-76). My notes in previous chapters refer to the close collaboration between the two on the issue of sexual difference and ordering. In this and other lectures, she is emphatic that women maintain full ethical integrity in their subordination to men, and she insists that subordination to male activity does not mean that men mediate their relationship to God. She attempts to support this claim by insisting that by holding to their place in the order, each is obeying God. When women submit to male direction, they are obeying the command of God rather than obeying a human command that mediates God's command. It is the man's role to lead and decide, and women in responding to this direction, are not passive objects, she declares, but active agents who decide to subject themselves to the decision of the male as their own free decision to obey the divine command (65-66). Behind this statement, as with Barth's own account, we can discern the figure of Eve as she silently chooses to refrain from choice: to allow Adam to do the busy work of thinking, deciding, electing—ultimately the busy work of ethical activity—for and on her behalf. Although like Barth she insists that this does not make the male the mediator of the relation to God, neither of them explain how this male mediating role can possibly be avoided, in the context of a command ethic in which each is to seek to hear and discern for themselves the specific command of God in every event of decision. If she must follow the decision-making of the male as he attempts to discern and obey the command of God (rather than undertake this activity herself), then she cannot avoid allowing him to mediate the command to her. The subordination of women to men thus effectively absolves women of the ethical burden of persistently discerning and deliberating the command of God.

With these words Barth plays the part in the order that he has assigned to his sex, instructing and directing women to the proper place and appropriate dispositions that will ensure a peaceful communion between the sexes and the role he has secured for himself in it.

Barth next describes a disordered relationships, one that he expects will be more familiar to his reader. This relationship features tyrannical (*tyrannisch*) man, who attempts to make the order (and thus woman herself) serve his own interests and desires, and the compliant or submissive (*hörige*) woman, who adapts herself to his manipulation. The latter plays her part in the disorder by conforming herself to what the tyrant expects from her: “She finds it convenient to make things as convenient as possible for him. She also finds it attractive-and the clever tyrant will certainly support this view-to be his pliable kitten, his flattering mirror. In pleasing him, she thus pleases herself” (178/198-9).³⁰

Barth imagines this sort of relationship will follow an inevitable trajectory. It will prove to be unsustainable for both, but especially for the compliant woman, “for even when she co-operates she is in fact the one who is injured and suffers. The disorder will be avenged on her first” (178). But why should she suffer the most? Because the order assigns to the male the ethical burden of securing her interest along with his own and thus overseeing the progress and communion between them, and so if he cannot and does not secure her interests, they will not be secured; if she is to resist his abuse and assert her needs or demand her rights she only deepens the disorder by playing tyrant herself (a miming of man’s own distorted performance of his God-given prerogative). This is precisely the trajectory Barth now imagines a disordered relationship will take.

³⁰ Such disordered relationships come in a variety of guises, Barth tells us, some of which are not always the most obvious for, “there are quiet, gentle, amiable, easy-going tyrants who suit women only too well, and it is an open question in which form the male tyrant is worse and more dangerous” (177/198).

As the story unfolds, the compliant woman enables (even invites) male tyranny, but since her own interests cannot be secured in a relationship that man has designed to advance his own ends, she will eventually tire of this unsatisfactory game and seek to extricate herself from the abuse (178). She will do so by asserting her own needs and defending her own interests in an overt grab for power that can only mime the tyrant's will to mastery and thus deepen the disorder. But when she does so, the compliant has unveiled and exposed her true identity as the rebellious (*rebellische*) woman. Barth's caricature of this rebel resembles his earlier depiction of the power-grasping envious feminist (155):

For somewhere in the submissive [*hörigen*] woman there lies concealed-not merely crouching in readiness, but already active-the rebellious [*rebellische*] woman. In her own way even the submissive woman illegitimately exercises power over man. By her very compliance-she knows well enough what she is about-she grasps at control over man. She avenges herself for his tyranny by performing so exactly the part which he desires her to play. In her voluntary weakness and readiness to yield, she acquires authority over him and is secretly the stronger. But this secret state of affairs can and must break out and come into the open. The order which is only apparently respected, but in reality abused and perverted, can clearly be challenged and infringed openly. Where it is not really obeyed, it may one day occur to woman to question not only the claimed prerogatives and postured lordship but also the real primacy of man, openly abandoning her position and snatching power from his hands. This dramatic turn obviously demands a change of scenery. Claim is now met by counter-claim, power by power, tyrant by tyrant. What objection can man bring when he himself and primarily is a transgressor of the order? The conflict thus starts in real earnest. It is now to be seen which will prove the stronger party. But whatever the result, on neither side is there right in the true and Christian sense. (178-80/199-201)³¹

Barth's gaze pierces the veil of compliant woman's passive malleable show to discover that she is covertly far more active than she is entitled to be, engaged in a manipulative effort to secure

³¹ If Barth's depiction of the complacent-turned-rebel woman here echoes his depiction of the modern feminist movement, then perhaps the trajectory her rebellion takes subtly expresses Barth's assessment and anxiety over the rise and impact of the feminist movement. The arrogant, would-be male master of human history is now suffering the consequences of his tyranny before the face of feminist counter-tyranny, and what legs can he stand on? "As the offended and humiliated party, woman does not have right on her side, but she has the appearance of right....How can he now dare to assert his primacy over her" (178-80/199-201).

her own interests (178-80/199-201). If this “pliable kitten” will finally expose herself as the rebel [feminist], then this can only mean that tyrannical man will eventually expose himself for the weakling he has been all along: unable to retain control over his rebel, he will eventually bow to her (somewhat justified—Barth admits) rebellion, becoming even weaker, or he will attempting to reassert control, thereby beginning the vicious circle all over (178-80/199-201). But he is now in a weakened position, for “as the offended and humiliated party, woman does not have right on her side, but she has the appearance of right....How can he now dare to assert his primacy over her?” (178-80/199-201).

The way out of a disordered relationship is not, Barth instructs, “a question of woman attaining her rights as opposed to man” but rather of “man's understanding the order and sequence and therefore the obligation in which he is the first” (171). She is not to protest or rebel, apparently she is not to “do” anything at all, for the way back to order is for man to play his part.³²

Barth's final model prescribes the way back to that order in which man becomes “*der gütigen Mann*” and woman “*die bescheidende Frau*.” This sort of woman does not assert herself, demand her rights, protest, rebel or complain in the face of male tyranny, abuse, and exploitation. Rather she will find a way to incite the man to play his part by appealing to his inclination to do so.³³ How so exactly, Barth does not say. Barth's “*bescheidende Frau*” is the picture of “quiet

³² Barth writes: “By simply protesting and rebelling, woman, even though she were a thousand times in the right, does not affirm and respect the order under which she also stands and by which alone she can vindicate her rights. Indeed, it may well be that her protesting and rebelling spring from the same source of contempt for order with which man offends her so deeply. The real service which she ought to render in this matter-indirectly in her own favour-is certainly not yet performed by the mere fact of her opposing man when he turns order into disorder” (170-1).

³³ Barth writes: “But we come to the point where woman may in fact be the educator of man, so long, be it noted, as she does not evade her proper subordination. And now the circle may be closed. For the kind man, who is instructed in kindness by the self-knowledge and self-restriction of the woman, is identical with the strong man with whom we

[*ruhend*] self-restriction,” gentle resistance, and modest self-restraint: she knows who she is as a woman in her differentiation from men, she knows her place in the order, and keeps to it in the very act of refraining from asserting or defending her rights and needs. He seems to imagine that a pious, dignified, quiet, long-suffering disposition will evoke the best in self-serving, abusive men, and he seems remarkably confident that the latter have the capacity to be so readily redirected. It is precisely in this self-restraint and self-limitation that Barth imagines her existence might serve as “an appeal to the kindness [*Gütig*] of men” (181/201).³⁴ “Kindness belongs originally to his particular responsibility as a man” (180-1/201), Barth declares, and his description of it indicates that it coincides with the ethical impulse of §45.2:

In human relationships kindness is not the same thing as condescension. It means the free impulse (*Bewegung*) in which a man interests himself in his neighbour because he understands him and is aware of his obligation towards him. The self-restricting [*bescheidende*] woman appeals to the kindness of man. She puts him under an obligation to be kind. The opposite is also true, but in this respect the advantage is perhaps with woman. She may win the respect of man. If he is capable of this at all, it is in face of the mature and therefore self-restricting woman.... Such a woman puts man under an obligation. He can and must take such a one seriously. If anything can disturb his male tyranny and therefore his male weakness, if anything can challenge him to goodness and therefore to the acceptance of woman, it is encounter with the self-restricting woman. Why? Because her maturity is displayed in her self-restriction. (180-1/201)

If kindness belongs originally and properly to man then self-restraint belongs originally and properly to woman, for “she need not wait for the kind man to know and limit herself, as he need not wait for the modest woman to be kind” (180-1/201).

commenced this discussion. What is manly strength if not the power with which man in his relationships with woman may in obedience to the order of things seize responsibility and take the initiative? As a strong man he confirms the order, the order in which woman in her place is not simply subordinate to him, but stands at his side”(180-1/201). But how does she instruct and educate man without subverting the order? Barth provides no answer.

³⁴ Barth writes: “In face of an erring man the mature woman will not only be sure of herself in her quiet [*ruhend*] self-restriction, but she will also know her duty and witness towards him. Successfully or otherwise- and we now turn over another leaf-she is in her whole existence an appeal to the kindness of man” (181/201).

Barth's antidote to both feminist rebellion and male tyranny is then, none other than the silent Eve of Genesis 2, who need not say or do anything at all for Adam to play his ordained part. And Barth is astonishingly optimistic about the tyrant's capacity to be called to order by the inactive activity of his abused partner. Barth continues to play the part he prescribes, as he points and directs women back to their place in the order, assuring them that their interests are best served if they confine themselves to this place and content themselves to await the good will and ethical busy work of the men in securing their interests and that of their common life together.

If there is a place in this narrative for woman to enact the gratuitous, spontaneous, self-revealing, yet critically corrective self-expression of the "I" of §45.2, Barth does not explain how she is to perform it without subverting the order. In his very description of the disorderly woman he performs the role he has allotted for himself. He gives no sense that such a self-revealing activity is even needed from her, for he can already see through the complaint's performance, and he already knows that what she is really after is his own privileged position. Not until she finds her way back to her own proper place, respecting his prerogative to direct her there, is he ready to hear what she might have to say of herself. Nor did Adam need to hear the voice of Eve in order to name and label her. However, if Eve is to play the part of the "I" in §45.2, then her critique of and resistance to such tyrannical activities, misperceptions, and assumptions, is all part of the performance. The ethical impulse of that movement has no place for the sort of quiet restraint Barth here demands of woman. It has no place, because its analogue is the gracious, self-revealing, critically-corrective movement of the incarnate Word toward humankind.

CONCLUSION

Barth's final discussion of sexual difference completes the picture he began with his narrative re-description of Adam and Eve in III/1. Human beings encounter their divine other in the man Jesus Christ, and they encounter their true human other in the opposite sex. Cutting through Christ's ever-widening circle of fellow-sufferers is the line that distinguishes one sex from the other. All other inter-human differences are permeable, fluid, and open to renegotiation. This one difference must be sustained and preserved through the faithful and discerning performance of culturally contingent customs, conventions, and norms. The command of God will come specified in the medium of these gender norms, and since that command is not readily transparent to the agent, ethical deliberation includes a discerning critical relationship to gender norms. While the command of God is not identical to sexual difference itself, Barth assures his readers it will not summon them to a transgression of this dividing line, and so the critical performance of gender norms must faithfully instantiate the difference. While the burden is on each individual to discern the specified command of God for themselves, in their critical performance, the male's privileged place in the ordering of the sexes secures him the role of overseeing the proper maintenance of the distinction itself. Woman is free to speak and enact her difference before him, as long as this speech and activity does not entail a grasping after privileges and activities he has already secured for himself.

Barth's order exerts a corrupting and distorting influence on Barth's ethical picture of an "I" that lets itself, its assumptions, and its categories be put into question by its "Thou" (as articulated in §18 and §45.2). This order sets restraints on the unsettling impact of the female other. Barth's male subject retains control of the terms under which his female other will question and unsettle him. In spite of his insistence to the contrary, this male prerogative reduces

female agency to an atrophied version of the male. She keeps her place in the order by restraining her ethically oriented activity of seeking, speaking, and hearing the male other in order for him to act and speak first on her behalf. Male precedence thus costs her key characteristics of Barth's seeking, speaking agent who is always in motion towards its others.

Barth's depiction of human agency in §54 retains resources and mechanisms for questioning and resisting these two problems—his reification of sexual difference and his truncated female agent. First, with respect to Barth's truncated female agent, I have argued from the beginning that his construal of agency is one of ceaseless motion toward divine and creaturely others. There is no place in his account for the restraint and restrictions he burdens the would-be female agent with here. If she is to discern and speak her sexual specificity with the generous intent of correcting the misperceptions of male onlookers and tyrants, then there can be no talk of withholding this aid lending activity. She cannot undertake such a correction if she must subordinate this activity to male hearers; if she must grant them the privilege of discerning whether she is speaking her sexual specificity or enviously grasping after the characteristics, roles, and rights they have claimed for their own sex; if she must concede to them the task of discerning for themselves the extent and reach of her specificity.

Second, in regard to sexual difference, Barth elevates this difference above other differences (race, class, national belonging) by abstracting this difference from its instantiation in cultural norms and conventions and rendering it immune to critique or questioning. I have shown how difficult this move proves to be for Barth if he is to continue to resist a natural theology that conflates the divine command with social conventions and orders. He must avoid describing what this difference entails and thus reading the divine command into constantly changing cultural norms and conventions, and yet he relies on shared assumptions about the indisputable

givenness of sexual difference to assert its privileged place as the structural divider pervading all other distinguishing features of human individuality. But because he refuses to reduce sexual difference to biological, psychological, and sociocultural definitions, he sets the agent in a critical relationship to all such conventions, and on a path of deliberately discerning, evaluating, and critically appropriating these norms and constraints. Barth's assumption of a fixed, oppositional alterity between the sexes is thus itself susceptible to this sort of critical exercise and to subversive performances.

I have argued that Barth's christological agent does not conform readily to Barth's heteronormative framework, and in §54 Christ finds a home here only on the boundaries of this sphere. I have argued that if we return Christ (as Barth construes him in §45.1 and §54.3) back to the center of inter-human fellowships, then his relationship to his ever widening circle of fellows, his unmarried status, and the theological insignificance of his sexed identity, together expose the instability of this binary and its pretensions to a mysterious, unassailable site above the social conventions in which it is instantiated. It falls into place alongside other differences that are fluid and open to contestation and renegotiation. In the figure of Christ in an ever-widening circle of fellows, Barth provides a different model of human fellowship and ethical accountability, one that is not burdened, constrained, and distorted by the binary, oppositional dyadic model of a heterosexual marriage.

EPILOGUE

I have focused on two central problems in Barth's account of sexual difference that have earned its heteronormative and androcentric label. First Barth reifies sexual difference and with it a heteronormative structure for human relationships. Appealing to the creation of man and woman in the Genesis 1 and 2, he elevates sexual difference as a fixed oppositional binary that transcends all other differences, dividing all human beings into two groups. It is a division that Barth considers to be immune to critique or renegotiation. Furthermore, since this division is the central site of inter-human alterity, the relationship between the sexes occupies the center of Barth's theological anthropology insofar as it provides the occasion for the fullest realization of human existence, which Barth construes as a being-in-encounter with another. The marital relationship between a man and woman provides the occasion in which a human being may most fully conform him or herself to the relationship that Christ has with other human beings.

Second Barth's asymmetrical ordering of the relationship between the sexes ultimately produces a truncated model of female agency. While all human beings depend on one another and have an ethical obligation to lend aid to the one another, men retain an agential precedence and initiative that women lack. This precedence and initiative eludes description, for Barth is dubiously reticent on developing its implications, and for good reason. I have argued that male precedence coincides with the ethical obligation of the human agent, as he imitates the gracious activity of Christ by coming to the aid and need of the human other. In his ordering of the relation between the sexes, Barth genders his model agent and subsequently restrains the ways in which females are to appropriate his account of human agency. Thus while Barth's always-in-motion agent is both dependent on the aid of the other and simultaneously obligated to come to

the aid of the other, if she is a woman, she must restrain this aid-lending movement toward the other in order to allow the male to play this part on her behalf. That is, she must restrain the ethical impulse that is so central to the ways in which Barth patterns human agency after christological agency. Barth thus produces an unlivable model of agency for women: they are to hasten to lend aid to their male others, yet at the same time they are to restrain themselves in so doing, in order to allow men to preempt them in this respect.

I have worked to disentangle Barth's agent from his seemingly intransigent and pernicious heteronormativity and heterosexism. I will now draw together the strands of the previous chapters to highlight those aspects of Barth's understanding of agency that enable this disentanglement, and I will gesture to the avenues of exploration that this opens up.

DISENTANGLING THE AGENT FROM A SEXIST ORDER

As we have seen, many critics of Barth's complementarian account of the sexes suspect that these two features (the sexual binary and its hierarchical ordering) are inevitable consequence of his dogmatic commitment to an all-powerful divine actor and a subordinate, obedient human agent. They find this commitment produces a recurring pattern of hierarchically ordered, dyadic relationships. This line of analysis and critique has focused on the problem of the ordering of the sexes and has interrogated the ways in which this ordering does or does not play out in other binary relationships within Barth's theology: Father and Son, God and humankind, heaven and earth, soul and body, Yahweh and Israel, Christ and Church, Christ's divinity and Christ's humanity. The suspicion is that an ordering, wherein one actor leads and directs another, is pervasive and corrupts even the most promising resource for an egalitarian intervention, the immanent trinitarian relation of Father and Son, for here too one actor preempts, precedes and

directs another. Within such a network of analogous relationships, Barth's asymmetrically ordered relationship between the sexes appears unavoidable.¹

For many of these critics, the ordering of the sexes exposes a systemic structure of domination and submission that is instantiated in the many relationships that comprise Barth's theology. Barth replicates the oppositional hierarchical relationship between God and humankind in every dogmatic register that he explores. From the vantage point of this line of analysis and critique, the mutuality and reciprocity of the inter-human I/Thou relation in §45.2 occupies an ambiguous site. Either it is not as reciprocal as it appears at first glance, for it harbors a self-asserting "I" that imposes itself on a responding "Thou," and is thus another iteration of the same problematic ordering. Or the reciprocity of this unilateral scene of recognition, shared dependency, and shared obligation is an aberration found nowhere else in Barth's theology, not even in the relation between Father and Son, for all their ontological equality.²

I have come to a different conclusion by drawing attention to a recurring pattern of agency in Barth's theology. I have argued that Barth's methodological, dogmatic, and ethical commitments to a particular construal of a relationship-initiating, self-revealing, human-enabling divine activity results in an account of human agency that make his binary oppositional and hierarchical ordering of the sexes unsustainable.

By focusing on a recurring pattern of human agency in *Dogmatics* I have exposed what I find to be a weakness in this dominant line of critique. This approach focuses primarily on the problematic ordering of the relationship between the sexes and examines the ways in which

¹ I have discussed this literature on Barth's account of sexual difference in the Introduction and Chapter Four.

² For this difference of opinion on the value of Barth's I/Thou relation in §45.2, see the Introduction's discussion of Lisa P. Stephenson, ("The male and female interpersonal relation in Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*," 435-449), Elouise Fraser, "Karl Barth's Doctrine of Humanity," and Fraser, "Jesus' Humanity and Ours in the Theology of Karl Barth," 179-96.

Barth grounds this order in other analogously ordered relationships. To approach Barth's theology in this way is to allow the pattern of order in Barth's account of sexual difference to frame and shape the interpretation of the other relationships in Barth's *Dogmatics*. This interpretive lens is an ordering that Barth develops very poorly in §45.3 and §54.1 (indeed he barely explains how he imagines it will play out) and fails to integrate into his carefully developed depiction of the human agent in §45.2. This interpretive lens thus distorts Barth's understanding of human agency in its relationship to multiple sites of alterity, for it reduces his "analogy of relations" to a series of dyads comprised of two types of actors: those who lead, command, direct, and those who follow, obey, and respond.

I have argued that due to Barth's christocentric methodological commitments his theological anthropology offers only one model of human agency, based on a pattern of activity he finds manifested in Christ. In §§44-45 Barth carefully conforms his human agent to a pattern of divine activity that is reiterated in anthropological, incarnational, and trinitarian registers. In each of these registers Barth locates the self-revealing, saving, relationship-constituting activity of the Word-made-flesh, which constitutes and sets in motion an imitative human activity directed toward other human beings.

Human agents are always already constituted by this christological activity. They are constituted as recipients of an un-repayable gift that imposes on them an obligation to imitate this gratuitous activity in a turn toward other human beings, on whom they depend for the same sort of aid. That is, human beings are always already set in motion by their divine benefactor and directed toward their neighbors in a relationship of dependency and obligation that is analogous to their relationship to the divine benefactor.

In this construal of human agency, “order” comes into view as the self’s orientation toward the other. Because human beings are always already constituted in relationship to others (divine and human), they are ordered and directed to these others in a relationship of dependency and obligation. Order thus plays out as an inter-relational receiving and giving: benefiting from the gratuitous activity of the other and playing benefactor to the other. Thus in both §18 and §45.2, Barth depicts human agents as simultaneously dependent on the help of their neighbors and ethically obligated to lend help to them. They are to be responsive to the needs and activity of the other and are obligated to address these needs and to make their own needs known, while at the same time they are dependent on the aid of another who shares this same need and obligation.

Barth’s depiction of the relation of self to other is ethically burdened. I argued that in §45.2 the ethical obligation of the “I” to move toward an understanding of the nature and needs of the other and to come to the aid of the other reflects and is patterned after the gracious movement of Christ toward humankind. For while the human agent depends on and needs the aid of its fellow neighbors, it imitates Christ’s grace by acting at the risk of not receiving what it needs. In other words, as a would-be imitator of Christ, I am not to treat my relation to the other as a transaction in which I give only if I have received or expect to receive in kind. Rather I am to give at the risk of never receiving in kind, because Christ has given what I can never repay in kind

I have argued that Barth’s construal of human agency does not allow for the order Barth imposes on sexually differentiated agents. Barth’s super-/subordering of the sexes assigns to the male the role of imitating Christ’s grace by preempting and preceding the female in this aid-lending activity. In this way, and in spite of his claims to the contrary, he confines human agency

to men alone. For to claim that it is a male prerogative to imitate Christ's relation to the Church is to claim that it is a male prerogative to imitate Christ's aid-lending gratuitous activity. Such a claim robs women of their very humanity by robbing them of the ethical gratuitous impulse that drives the human agent toward its other. It sets restraints on the ways women are to come to the aid of their male neighbors. They are *not* always-already set in motion toward their male others. Rather they are suspended in an unlivable state of passivity that persistently awaits the aid-lending initiative of men. Barth never troubles himself to explain how women are to "enact" this state of restraint, indeed how could he? He gives us only the figure of the silent immobile Eve. Barth's ordering of the sexes thus distorts and truncates the female agent.

The super-/subordering of the relationship between the sexes does not, then, expose an insidious pattern of domination and submission permeating Barth's theology as many have suspected. Rather it is a one-sided, tangential, unsustainable departure that Barth tacks onto his account of human agency in §45.2 and §54.1, with corrupting and distorting consequences. The mutuality and reciprocity of the relation of "I" to "Thou" in §45.2 is not an aberration in a series of hierarchal ordered dyads. Rather it is the order of §45.3 and §54.1 that is an aberration, tacked tenuously onto his account of human relationships, and it fails to cohere with his construal of agency in §45.2. It fails to cohere with that agential pattern as it plays out in Barth's earlier readings of biblical scenes of inter-human encounter: Barth's reading of the Lucan parable of the fallen Israelite and Samaritan and his reading of the Lucan encounter between Mary and Elizabeth. In the case of the latter, we see that Barth is fully capable of imagining women performing a pattern of activity that becomes a male prerogative later on in his reading of Adam's encounter with Eve. Barth does not attempt to integrate his ordering of first and second actors, leaders and followers, into the mutual reciprocal scene recognition and address in §45.2

because he cannot do so and still maintain his claim that women are fully functioning agents. Instead he makes two contradictory claims: the relationship is one of mutual dependency and obligation, and the relationship is one in which the men assumes the ethical prerogative of imitating Christ to women. He evasively defers the contradiction between these two claims to Galatians 3 and I Corinthians 11 and thus to Paul.

In developing this argument I have joined a growing number of interpreters who have worked to correct the long-held suspicion and widely voiced criticism that Barth's divine subject overwhelms and eviscerates Barth's human subject.³ My reading of Barth's construal of human agency has also resisted this suspicion. However, I have deferred the charge of an eviscerated agent to Barth's subordinate female agent. The human agent is always-already set in motion by divine grace, directed toward its creaturely others. But because Barth attempts to transpose the strictly divine prerogative (to initiate and constitute relationships with the creaturely other) onto the male human, he disables the would-be-female agent.

If women are indeed to be the sort of agents Barth imagines in §45.2 then there is no place for talk of restraint or silence. As benefactors of Christ's grace, they too are to hear the call of the Christ to "go and do likewise," to play neighbor to the other. If, as Barth suggests in both in §45.1 and §54.1, part of this movement of self to other entails a self-revealing corrective of the misperceptions of the other, then Barth's account of human agency secures a place for precisely the sort of feminist critique that he attempts to quash with his talk of subordination and a pious restraint that would incite men to play their part properly: a critique that challenges the prerogatives and positions of power that Barth presumes are proper to men alone.

³ I discuss the literature on Barth's human agent and ethics in my Introduction.

DISENTANGLING THE AGENT FROM A HETERONORMATIVE FRAMEWORK

So much for the ordering of the sexes, but what of Barth's heteronormative construal of human relationships? Because Barth identifies the relationship between the sexes as *the* site for the agent's fullest conformity to the relational activity of Christ, the marital relationship between a man and a woman becomes the normative center for evaluating the significance, depth, and value of all other human relationships. Barth casts homosexual relationships outside the sphere of human fellowship, depicting them as self-loving, self-isolating repudiations of the human "other," who is most properly embraced only in someone of the opposite sex. He marginalizes various patterns of communal living, same-sex organizations, and monastic orders, all of which he likewise deems suspect of an isolated rejection of fellowship with the "other."

The relationship between the sexes occupies this central site and provides this ethical occasion because Barth imagines the difference between the sexes as a fixed, permanent, structural difference—the only one of its sort among the many differences demarcating human beings from each other. Because it provides the primary site of inter-human alterity, he imagines a marital relationship between two members of the opposite sex is best suited to reflect the difference and thus the alterity-crossing relationship between Jesus Christ and his community.

I have drawn attention to the challenge that the gospel picture of the unmarried Christ presents for Barth's unreflective, eurocentric, dyadic construal of human relationships, for it exposes the difficulty Barth has in securing a two-sex relational framework for an anthropology that purports to be built out of christology. Barth's initial response to this challenge, in §41 and §45, is to ignore Christ's celibacy and efface the significance of Christ's sexed corporal existence. He makes no mention of Christ's or Paul's unmarried state, nor of their words in praise of celibacy, nor does he attempt to use narratives about Christ's interaction with women to

inform his elevation and depiction of the relationship between the sexes. At one point, he refers to the silent and hidden character of Christ's corporal existence within the New Testament, and he notes in particular the New Testament's silence regarding Christ's health and celibacy (III/2, 329-30, esp. 330). He keeps Christ at the center of his two-sex framing of human fellowship through the use of Paul's marital metaphor of Christ's relationship to a bridal Church. This amplifies Barth's detachment of his christological reference point from the corporal and physiological dimensions of human existence, thereby further mystifying the nature of this intransigent "structural difference."

In §54, when Barth deals more concretely with the question of how one is to faithfully perform one's sexually differentiated existence, he finally attempts to come to terms with Christ's and Paul's unmarried state and their praise of celibacy. He can do so only by securing a place for their existence on the margins of his two-sex framework for ordering human fellowship—as paradoxical, emergency iterations of the norm. He finally allows that their celibate state functions to relativize the marital relationship by setting it alongside other possible ways of imitating Christ, and he admits that celibacy is a more direct imitation of Christ's relationship to the opposite sex. Nevertheless, marriage retains its central normative site because the difference between the sexes continues to provide the central site of inter-human alterity. So it is not surprising that, while Barth admits the celibate life is a more direct way of imitating Christ, he nevertheless suspects same-sex social organizations and celibate religious orders have rejected the human "other" and embraced a life of self-isolation and self-love. Thus, while he finally acknowledges the significance of Christ's unmarried state, he fails to address the significance of the Christ's life and ministry in the fellowship and company of twelve men.

Bath's determination to maintain a christological point of reference for theological anthropology flounders very obviously here. The figure of the unmarried Christ is of significance to my project, for it exposes a key weakness in Barth's heteronormative construal of human fellowship and ethical responsibility. Throughout my chapters I have drawn attention to the ways in which Barth's christological interpretive method uses biblical texts to challenge his contemporaries' dogmatic and cultural assumptions. Barth uses biblical characters (the Good Samaritan, Adam, Mary, Elizabeth) to prefigure and point to Christ. He uses these characters to challenge contemporary assumptions about the nature of human freedom, mastery, and power. Such challenges expose the need for a critical evaluation and reconfiguration of dominant theological assumptions, commitments and categories. Barth's efforts to conform the figure of Christ to his complementation two-sex framing of human fellowship exposes his assumption about a mystifying alterity between the sexes as a limiting scheme that requires critical interrogation and reconfiguration. Rather than allowing the figure of Christ to put into question his assumption about the fixed alterity between the sexes and their relational orientation toward each other, he must shift Christ to the margins of this particular domain of human relationships. To return Christ to the methodological center of his christologically funded theological anthropology would call into question his assumption that sexual difference provides the greatest site of inter-human alterity and therefore the most opportune occasion for the fullest realization of human fellowship, intimacy, and companionship.

The figure of Christ, in his relation to other human beings, thus invites a critical intervention into Barth's account of sexual difference. Toward this end, I have drawn attention to some other images of Christ's relationship to his fellows, which Barth uses when he is not attempting to secure sexual difference at the center of human fellowship. These images invite a

decentralizing of sexual difference analogous to Barth's decentering of ethnic difference. They suggest, furthermore that Barth's understanding of inter-human fellowship is not as constrained by this two-sex framework as it appears within the confines of §41, §45.2 and §54.1.

In Chapter 4 I noted the image of Jesus the crucified, in his company of fellow sufferers. Barth invites his readers to recognize themselves among this company: to see in Christ and this host of people their own neighbors—on whom they must depend and for whom they are responsible (III/2, 241). In Chapter 5, I drew attention to the image of Christ at the center of an ever widening circle: disciples, the crowds following him, his enemies, and “the countless millions who have not yet heard His name” (216/257). Barth uses this image to point to the fluidity of the boundaries by which we distinguish ourselves from others, such as language, geography, and shared history. He depicts these boundaries as open to constant re-negotiation. The would-be imitator of Christ is to continually tread the path from near to distant neighbors, in a movement toward an ever increasing understanding of and intimacy with these others: a movement that constantly shifts the boundaries between the “near” and “far.” This depiction of the fluidity of ethnic differences resonates with Barth's earlier reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan. I argued in Chapter 1 that Barth uses the relationship between the lawyer and Jesus and between the fallen Israelite and the Samaritan to detach the biblical concept of the neighbor, for whom one is responsible, from any association with contemporaneous appeals to societal institutions of shared blood and nationhood. Within the sphere of God's grace, there is no outside to the Christian's ethical obligation. With these images, Barth sets his reader on a ceaseless movement toward an ever-widening circle of neighbors, ready for the redirection and reorientation that the neighbor imposes on the self.

Such images suggest a far more open, fluid and flexible way of thinking about the self's relationship to other human beings, inclusive of a wide variety of relationships and communal organizations, than does Barth's use of dyadic, oppositional marital figures (Adam and Eve, Yahweh and Israel, Christ and Church). They invite us to locate sexual difference on the same plane and with the same fluidity of other differences, like ethnicity, age, and class. This wide range of relationships would allow more diverse occasions for imitating Christ's relationship to others, including homosexual relationships, various types of friendships, communal arrangements, and monastic orders. With the aid of the figure of Adam from §41, we can expand this sphere of ethical obligation and cohabitation well beyond the boundaries of human actors, to incorporate the full range of creaturely others. Adam finds himself in a network of non-human collaborators (animal life, plant life, water, mineral), on whom he depends and who likewise depend on him. Adam recognizes the gracious provision of God for him in the activities and functions of these many creaturely others, and he recognizes also his own obligation to come to their aid in playing his part of service to animals, garden, and earth. These images of the human agent and its ethical obligation expose the distorting and delimiting effects of Barth's efforts to make the marital relationship the normative center of the self's relationship to creaturely others.

But what of the self's relationship to gender conventions? In my final chapter I pointed to the critical and performative dimensions of Barth's agent, in its relationship to the social conventions, customs, and mores regulating the distinction between the sexes. These features resonate in suggestive ways with some contemporary trajectories in gender theory. They lend themselves to a critical and performative understanding of sexual difference that might resist and undermine Barth's assumption that sexual difference entails an unnegotiable fixed site of alterity

that must be carefully policed and maintained. I will close by gesturing in this direction with the aid of Judith Butler.

In my final two chapters I showed that while Barth depicts sexual difference as a stable structural difference permeating every other difference, he does not reduce the difference to the mores, conventions, or customs through which it is appropriated. He has rejected any natural theology that would read God's nature, will, or commands out of creaturely phenomenon--natural, cultural, historical, or psychological. In keeping with this commitment, he is careful not to ground sexual difference in reproductive, biological, philosophical, psychological, or social discourses, and he announces the freedom of God's command from contemporaneous typologies and stereotypes of the sexes. Thus while he asserts that the difference between the sexes occupies the central site of inter-human alterity, he refrains from any attempt to describe what precisely distinguishes the sexes, that it should acquire such a status. His reticence does not, however, free him from the trappings of a natural theology, for by persistently asserting that the two sexes provide the central site of a somewhat mystifying inter-human alterity, he must rely on, rather than critically examine, culturally contingent, romantic assumptions about the alterity between the sexes. Abstracting the difference between the sexes from the many, conventions, mores, and customs in which it is instantiated, he elevates it as an unassailable division, immune to critique and renegotiation. Thus while he is careful not to read the command of God out of cultural conventions and scientific discourses on the nature of sexes, he ultimately conflates that command with a distinction instantiated in such conventions, to the point that he cannot imagine that God's specified command would do anything other than direct the reader to carefully shore up of his or her distinction from the opposite sex, albeit through a critical relationship to the relative norms that make that distinction discernible.

Barth considers the norms, conventions, and mores proper to each sex to be somewhat elastic and vulnerable to subversive performances. Barth configures the sexed existence of the agent as a perpetual doing, a performance that extends to the most mundane matters of dress, style, and comportment. While this performance is accountable to a specified divine command that must be mediated through socio-cultural conventions, the command is never identical to these conventions nor is it ever immediately accessible. A critical relationship to these conventions is called for precisely because the divine command is not to be conflated with such conventions and is never immediately accessible or discernible. Barth thus calls his readers to a deliberative, thoughtful, exhaustive, all-embracing performance of their God-assigned sex. Yet at the same time it must be a critical, reflective discerning interaction with the discourses, mores and constraints through which the sexes are delineated, for God's specified command is not reducible to any set of conventions and may very well challenge them. This deliberative activity is to be undertaken, in part, for the purpose of situating oneself firmly on the appropriate side of the sexual divide. Hence Barth instructs his readers to resist the temptation of appropriating the distinctive characteristics, roles, and norms of the opposite sex (whatever those might be at any given time—their discernment is part of the ethical deliberation in which the agent is to engage).

I have noted how this tension between the givenness of sexual difference and the critical relationship to gender norms plays out in Barth's fleeting references to the feminist movement. He depicts the feminist movement not as a critical relationship to such conventions and norms but as an envious grasping after the prerogatives that his own sex has claimed and secured for itself. At the same time he insists that women of his day should not allow men to dictate how they are to discern and perform their part on their designated side of the division. Barth's pernicious ordering creeps in here, for when it comes to the ways in which the sexes are

to inhabit cultural norms, Barth performs his self-assigned male prerogative of discerning when women's critical relationship to norms and conventions is an envious grasping after what he and his sex have secured for themselves.

Barth's account of the self's relationship to gender norms is, then, a mixed bag. He refuses to naturalize sexual difference with reference to biological and reproductive functions, and his special ethics calls for a critical deliberative self-reflective and evaluative relationship to social conventions and normative constraints, yet at the same time the agent is bound to the way those very constraints function to distinguish the sexes. Sexual difference thus operates as an empty category that must pervade and govern every act that would concretize it in a particular socio-cultural framework. While there is an openness and fluidity in how one might perform one's sex, part of the critical exercise entails carefully discerning how to respect and honor the difference between the sexes and so to shore up one's sexual specificity in an oppositional framework

The gender theory of Judith Butler is helpful in harnessing Barth's understanding of agency to push this performative and deliberative account of the self's relation to gender norms further than Barth was willing to go: toward the destabilization and disruption of his male-female binary and a more open-ended construal of the sexed self.

Barth's actualistic command ethic and his depiction of the sexually differentiated self as a "doing" in relation to culturally contingent conventions has some suggestive affinities with Butler's performative account of gender.⁴ Butler speaks of gender as a doing: a stylized sustained practice of repeated acts (including bodily gestures, postures, movements, dress, and styles) that do not express but rather constitute an intelligible sexed identity within a regulatory

⁴ See especially Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), esp. 1-81; Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford U.P., 1997).

framework of social norms and constraints. Our rigid two-sex framework constrains and delimits the ways in which gender is performed, in which norms and constraints are appropriated, inhabited and contested.⁵

In her debate with structuralist accounts of sexual difference Butler interrogates the idea that sexual difference is a quasi-transcendental division, one that conditions and makes possible human subjectivity, thereby securing this one particular difference on an order unlike any other difference. Butler objects that such a view abstracts sexual difference from the gender binary (itself a sedimentation of social practices) and declares it an unassailable, pre-social law, immune to critical intervention or contestation. It situates the masculine and feminine positions beyond all contestation, setting them as the limits to contestation as such. In criticizing this view, she invites us to consider the seemingly indisputable givenness of sexual difference as itself a sedimentation of social practices, one that has come to exhaust the semantic field of intelligible gendered identities. She argues that the performance of gender is the apparatus by which the coherent binary of masculine and feminine is produced, normatized, and naturalized, and its coherence is secured at the cost of those permutations of gender which do not fit the binary, yet are as much a part of gender as its most normative instance. She suggests that if the performance of gender, in its multiple iterations, is the mechanism or apparatus by which the binaries of man and woman, male and female, masculine and feminine are constructed and naturalized, it might then also be the mechanism by which they are deconstructed and denaturalized: the very apparatus that seeks to install the norm might also work to undermine that very installation.⁶

Butler's challenge to a structuralist account of the heterosexualizing norm has aided my critique of Barth's construal of sexual difference. Butler helps expose the contingency of Barth's

⁵ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, esp. 178-9.

⁶ Butler, *Undoing Gender* (40-56, 174-203, esp. 42-5).

appeal to a pre-given, oppositional sexual binary. She helps us imagine Barth's agent as freed not only from the ethical oughts of culturally contingent stereotypes regulating the differences between the sexes, but freed also from the compulsory oppositional binary instantiated in these stereotypes, that would require of individuals an exhaustive performance aimed at carefully shoring up their distinction from the opposite sex. To be freed from the constraints of typologies of the sexes is to be free from the oppositional two-sex binary that such typologies instantiate. The self's relation to gender conventions might then entail performances that subvert and contest the seeming givenness of the two sex oppositional binary and its compulsory oppositional ordering of identity and desire.

In this respect, Barth's account of agency contains the critical and reflective mechanisms that we might readily turn upon the constraints of the rigid two-sex regulatory framework that he imposes. In freeing Barth's agent from its sexist and heterosexist entanglements, my intent has been, in part, to remove barriers to and clear space for fruitful and constructive appropriations of Barth's theological anthropology that engage and respond to contemporary theories and debate about gender.

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